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ELVES IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity

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ELVES IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity

Alaric Hall

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Foreword

Each time I have begun studying at another university, I have realised how much the last shaped my thought. This book is the product of three. Frequently returning to my *alma mater*, the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at Cambridge University, I have profited greatly from friends and acquaintances old and new. Sandra Cromey of the English Faculty Library is a pearl among librarians. I had the privilege, with the support of the ERASMUS programme, to spend 2003–4 in the Department of English at the University of Helsinki, supervised by Matti Kilpiö and Leena Kahlas-Tarkka, and subsequently to complete this book as a fellow of the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. But the core research was in and of the University of Glasgow, in the form of doctoral research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board, supervised by Graham Caie and Katie Lowe. There I was based in the blessedly happy Department of English Language, but the Glasgow Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, the Departments of Scottish and Medieval History, and above all the Department of Celtic were communities to which this study also owes much.

Much of my most important elf-research has taken place in the company of the friends I have made in these places and I am accordingly indebted to many more people than I can mention here. To name only the most direct contributors, versions of this book have enjoyed detailed comment from my supervisors, for whose support and assistance I am grateful; my examiners Andy Orchard and Stuart Airlie; and the series editor, John Hines. Numerous other friends have commented on versions or sections, often extensively: Mike Amey, Paul Bibire, Bethany Fox, Carole Hough, Alistair McLennan, Ben Snook, Harriet Thomsett, Clive Tolley; the Process Group of Helsinki's Research Unit for Variation, Contacts and Change in English; along with several of my colleagues at the Collegium, Petter Korkman, Juha Männinen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen and Petri Ylikoski. I have benefited further from the generosity of one-time strangers who found my doctoral thesis online and chose to send me comments: Dimitra Fimi, Frog, James Wade and especially Bernard Mees. Ben Snook and Bethany Fox along with Dave Cochran, Rory Naismith and Charles West have assisted with research materials, while Richard Burian, Jeremy Harte, Simon Horobin, Katie Lowe, Rod McConchie and Mark Zumbuhl have proved assiduous elf-spotters. The original idea for the project was Alex Woolf's; Bethany Fox, under the auspices of the aforementioned Research Unit, assisted with the final production of the text; while Jussi Mätäomena has also been instrumental in its completion. Some further specific debts are recorded in my footnotes. Needless to say,

however, this book's defects and errors are my own. Tell me about them via <http://www.alarichall.org.uk>.

The longer I spend in the business of education, the more I observe that academic achievement is directly proportional to parental support. Depressing though the point is in general, the dedication of this book emphasises my gratitude that in my case it is certainly true, and the rest of my family too have my thanks. Bethany Fox has been mentioned in her professional capacity above. But for the fun I've had writing this book, I thank her also as the person in the world to whom I am most especially not married.

Abbreviations

AHDWB	*Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch*
BL	British Library
DOE	*Dictionary of Old English*
DONP	*A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose / Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*
DOST	*Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*

Introduction

ONE assumes that when, around the end of the tenth century or the beginning of the eleventh, somewhere in the south-west of England, the scribe began what was probably the last stint on his manuscript of medical recipes, he did not guess that it would remain in use for over six hundred years – more or less until it came into the hands of Reverend Robert Burscough, who, passing it on to his friend Humphrey Wanley, transformed it from a practical text into an object of scholarship.[1] His parchment stiff, his script functional and the finished codex portable, the scribe was making a practical reference work for day-to-day use. Having already copied the Old English *Herbarium* and *Medicina de quadrupedibus*, he was concluding a large, miscellaneous collection of medical texts, known since Cockayne's edition as *Lācnunga* ('remedies').[2] One wonders whether, having reproduced the conventional prose direction 'Wið fǣrstice feferfuige ⁊ sēo rēade netele ðe þurh ærn inwyxð ⁊ wegbrāde wyll in būteran' ('For a violent, stabbing pain: feverfew and the "red nettle" [L. *Lamium purpureum*] that grows through the ?corn, and plantain. Boil in butter'), he registered any surprise as he proceeded to copy a long metrical charm on to folios 175–6v.[3] It has, at any rate, intrigued and challenged scholars since the nineteenth century:[4]

1 See A. N. Doane (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts in Microfiche Facsimile: Volume 1*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 136 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994), 26–36 [no. 265]; Edward Pettit (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: 'The Lacnunga'*, Mellen Critical Editions and Translations, 6a–b, 2 vols (Lewiston, NY: The Edward Mellen Press, 2001), pp. 134–5, 146–9; N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 305–6 [no. 231].

2 Oswald Cockayne (ed.), *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, The Rolls Series, 35, 3 vols (London: Longman *et al*., 1864–6), III 2–80.

3 Ed. J. H. C. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, Publications of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, n.s. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 173–6; collated with Doane, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 265. *Fǣrstice* is usually translated 'sudden stitch' (for example, Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 173). However, *stitch* in Modern English, when denoting a pain, denotes a 'sharp spasmodic pain in the side resulting from running or exercising' (*Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd edn (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1991), s.v.). But the connotations of *fǣr-* are suggested by the definitions of J. Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1898): 'sudden, intense, terrible, horrid' (cf. *DOE*, s.v.). As for *stice*, Bosworth and Toller gave the primary meanings 'a prick, puncture, stab, thrust with a pointed implement', though the only Middle English descendant of these meanings seems to have been 'a sharp, localized pain' (*MED*, s.v. *stiche*; see also Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 230–1). For *sēo rēade netele* as *Lamium purureum* see M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 142–3.

4 This may or may not have been intended as a separate remedy, but it seems either way to be intended for the same ailment: Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 215–17.

Hlūde wæran hȳ lā hlūde ðā hȳ ofer þone hlæw ridan
wæran ānmōde ðā hȳ ofer land ridan
scyld ðū ðē nū þū ðysne nīð genesan mōte
ūt lȳtel spere gif hēr inne sīe
stōd under linde under lēohtum scylde
þær ðā mihtigan wīf hyra mægen berǣddon
ꝛ hȳ gyllende gāras sændan
ic him ōðerne eft wille sændan
flēogende flāne forane tōgēanes
ūt lȳtel spere gif hit hēr inne sȳ ·
sæt smið slōh seax
lȳtel īserna wund swīðe
ūt lȳtel spere gif hēr inne sȳ
syx smiðas sǣtan wælspera worhtan
ūt spere næs in spere
gif hēr inne sȳ īsenes dǣl
hægtessan geweorc hit sceal gemyltan
gif ðū wǣre on fell scoten oððe wǣre on flǣsc scoten
oððe wǣre on blōd scoten
oððe wǣre on lið scoten nǣfre ne sȳ ðīn līf ātǣsed
gif hit wǣre ēsa gescot oððe hit wǣre ylfa gescot
oððe hit wǣre hægtessan gescot nū ic wille ðīn helpan
þis ðē tō bōte ēsa gescotes ðis ðē tō bōte ylfa gescotes
ðis ðē tō bōte hægtessan gescotes ic ðīn wille helpan
flēo [?MS *fled*] þær on fyrgenhǣfde
hāl westū helpe ðīn drihten
nim þonne þæt seax ādō on wǣtan ·

They were loud, yes, loud, when they rode over the (burial) mound; they were fierce when they rode across the land. Shield yourself now, you can survive this strife. Out, little spear, if there is one here within. It[5] stood under/behind lime-wood (i.e. a shield), under a light-coloured/light-weight shield, where those mighty women marshalled their powers, and ?they sent shrieking spears.[6] I will send another back, a flying arrow ahead in opposition. Out, little spear, if it is here within. A craftsman sat, forged a knife/knives; ?small as swords go, violent the wound.[7] Out, little spear,

5 Hitherto, commentators have assumed an unstated pronoun *ic* ('I') as the subject of *stōd* (Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 237); indeed, Pettit himself claimed that 'there is no apparent reference for a third party'. On the contrary, the obvious subject is that of the preceding sentence, *spere*. The three other occurrences of *Ūt, lȳtel spere* are all followed by lines which seem to concern the *spere*.

6 This reading is supported by the half-line 'giellende gār' in *Widsith* (line 128; ed. R. W. Chambers, *Widsith: A Study in Old English Heroic Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 223) and by the half-line formula *af/með geiri gjallanda* ('from/with a yelling spear') in stanzas 5 and 14 of the Eddaic *Atlakviða*, ed. Gustav Neckel, *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern: I. Text*, 4th rev. edn by Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Winter, 1962), 241, 242. It has the further attraction of producing a parallelism with the *flēogende flāne* returned by the speaker of the charm. However, the phrasing inferred from the manuscript spacing by A. N. Doane, 'Editing Old English Oral/Written Texts: Problems of Method (with an Illustrative Edition of Charm 4, *Wið Færstice*)', in *The Editing of Old English: Papers from the 1990 Manchester Conference*, ed. D. G. Scragg and Paul E. Szarmach (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 125–45, at 139 – 'and.hy.gyllende | garas sændan' – suggests 'and they, shrieking, sent spears' (cf. p. 143). This is no less plausible syntactically.

7 More literally '[a] small [one] of swords', reading *īserna* as a partitive genitive. On the difficulties here see Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 243–5. For *īsern* (lit. 'iron') as 'sword' see Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, s.v.

> if it should be here within. Six craftsmen sat, wrought slaughter-spears. Be out, spear, not in, spear. If there is here within a piece of iron/swords, the work/deed of *hægtessan*,[8] it must melt. If you were *scoten* in the skin or were *scoten* in the flesh, or were *scoten* in the blood, or were *scoten* in the limb (?joint), may your life never be harmed. If it was the *gescot* of *ēse*[9] or it was the *gescot* of *ælfe* or it was the *gescot* of *hægtessan*, now I want to (?will) help you. This for you as a remedy for the *gescot* of *ēse*; this for you as a remedy for the *gescot* of *ælfe*, this for you as a remedy for the *gescot* of *hægtessan*; I will help you. Fly around there on the mountain top.[10] Be healthy, may the Lord help you.
>
> Then take the knife; put it in (the) liquid.

This text – known now as *Wið fǣrstice* – is among the most remarkable of its kind in medieval Europe. Prominent among the threats which it seeks to counter are *ælfe*, the beings whose name has come into Modern English as *elves*. The seriousness with which *Wið fǣrstice*, and presumably its eleventh-century copyist, treat these beings challenges our conceptions of rationality and reality, of healing and Christianity. What were *ælfe*? What were *gescotu*, and why and how did *ælfe* cause them? What were the *ēse* and *hægtessan* with which they are associated and why were they grouped together? Moreover, although unique in many respects, *Wið fǣrstice* is only one of a range of Anglo-Saxon texts using the word *ælf*, which afford some answers but also bring questions of their own.

Anglo-Saxon England is unique among the early-medieval Germanic-speaking regions for the extent of its vernacular literary production and survival, and it is this that fits it as a case-study of non-Christian belief in early-medieval Europe. *Ælfe* are mentioned reasonably often in Anglo-Saxon texts, assuring them a canonical place in histories of medieval popular religion, but never in narratives like *Beowulf*'s account of Grendel, or our Early Irish stories of the *áes síde*.[11] Rather, our primary evidence for *ælfe* comes from passing mentions in poems, glossaries and medical texts. These mentions suit different kinds of analysis from narratives: they demand that we try to

8 I take *-an* here and elsewhere in the charm as a genitive plural, to provide parallelism with *ylfa* and *ēsa*; this has often been assumed previously but is discussed, to my knowledge, only by Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 246. Although the manuscript includes no other example of genitive plural *-an*, it contains similar inflexional levellings and there is a reasonable number of examples elsewhere in Old English: see Terry Hoad, 'Old English Weak Genitive Plural *-an*: Towards Establishing the Evidence', in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, ed. Malcolm Godden, Douglas Gray and Terry Hoad (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 108–29; Michael Lapidge and Peter S. Baker (ed. and trans.), *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, Early English Text Society, s.s. 15 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), xcviii.

9 Broadly 'pagan gods'; the meanings of this word are discussed below, esp. chapters 1 and 2.

10 The text is unsatisfactory here and the translation merely a conjecture; see Pettit's discussion, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 255–8.

11 For *ælfe*'s canonicity see, for example, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 725; Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 65; Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 87, 115, 165; Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 10, 141–2; Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf-Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

establish what *ælfe* were through a detailed scrutiny of what the word *ælf* meant. Integrating linguistic and textual approaches into an anthropologically inspired theoretical framework makes possible a history both of the word *ælf* and of the concepts it denoted throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, from pre-conversion times to the eleventh century. It proves possible to delineate important, hitherto unrecognised features of pre-conversion world-views, and this early evidence makes it possible to trace reliably some of the changes, continuities and tensions in belief experienced in English-speaking cultures in the centuries following conversion. Such beliefs do not bear witness to processes of Christianisation alone, however: they tell us about Anglo-Saxon constructions of illness, mental health, and healing; of group identities; and even of gender and sexual relationships.

The rest of this introduction discusses my methodologies, and what I think they can and cannot reveal. Hereafter, the study proceeds to the material which, historiographically, has dominated reconstructions of the beliefs of Germanic-speaking peoples: our medieval Scandinavian texts. These have been influential in interpretations of *ælf*, and their reassessment forms a necessary point of departure. They also provide a proximate and reasonably well-documented body of comparative material, relating both to the semantics of *ælf* and to the Anglo-Saxon world-views in which *ælfe* had meaning. The subsequent chapters are structured by theme: our earliest evidence for *ælfe*, some of it pre-textual (chapter 2); a cluster of evidence for *ælfe*'s combined male gender and effeminate character (chapter 3); the bulk of our Old English medical texts, among them *Wið fǣrstice*, focusing on the scholarly construct of 'elf-shot' and the importance of *ælf*-beliefs in healing practices (chapter 4), followed by a chapter focusing on a cluster of texts relating to the word *sīden*, which I argue to denote a variety of magic specifically associated with *ælfe*, whose significance I investigate through comparative material from elsewhere in north-west Europe (chapter 5). Finally, drawing together a number of themes from earlier chapters, I discuss the relationships of beliefs in *ælfe* to Anglo-Saxons' changing constructions of gender (chapter 6) before concluding with a renewed consideration of methodology, and summary of the book's arguments (chapter 7). Two appendices present additional material. As several of my arguments involve detailed reference to linguistic changes and variations which will not always be familiar to readers and have at times been poorly reported, the first describes the grammatical history of *ælf*. *Ælf*-words where *ælf-* is merely a hypercorrect form of *æl-*, and so excluded from the main study, are assessed in the second.

As my usage above suggests, the Anglian form *ælf* is the usual citation form for the *elf*-word in Old English, but for the plural, commentators often use the West Saxon form *ylfe*. This is reasonable insofar as the singular **ylf* and the plural **ælfe* are probably only attested in later reflexes, but the inconsistency has caused confusion.[12] Therefore, I use *ælfe* here as my plural citation form.

[12] The *MED* says that 'OE had a masc. *ælf*, pl. *ylfe*' (s.v. *elf*), as though it showed a systematic vowel alternation, as is genuinely the case in the etymological note for *fo͞t* 'OE *fōt*; pl. *fēt*'; the

Two compounds, **ælfisc* and **ælfig*, are never attested in Anglian forms, but these normalised alternatives have been used by the *Dictionary of Old English*. I adopt *ælfisc*, as its existence in Old English is shown by Middle English reflexes, but since *ylfig* appears only in this West Saxon form, it seems excessive, and potentially misleading, to abandon it. The usual citation form for Middle and Modern English is *elf*, plural *elves*, and for Scots *elf*, *elvis*. However, where the texts under discussion demand it, I also use other Middle English citation forms. As for cognate languages, Old Icelandic dictionaries may use *alfr* or *álfr*. *Alfr* was the normal form until perhaps the twelfth century, when lengthening to *álfr* took place as part of a regular sound-change.[13] Being otherwise unable to be consistent, I have preferred the more familiar *álfr*, despite the incongruity of using it regarding early texts. Medieval German dialects may have the citation forms *alp* or *alb* – *alp* is preferred here; medieval Frisian has *alf* or *elf*; I prefer *alf*. The word *ōs* (broadly, 'pagan god'), which has appeared already in the genitive plural form *ēsa* in *Wið færstice* and recurs frequently in this study, is not attested in the nominative plural. I have adopted *ēse* as my citation form, for reasons discussed in chapter 2.

A key contention of this study is that attention to linguistic detail is important. This being so, I have marked vowel-length in those early-medieval languages where it was still phonemic – most prominently Old English. This has involved introducing macrons to editions and transcriptions where the text has none, though I have shied from marking length on certain common names (for example *Beowulf*, Alfred). Although Fulk has shown that unstressed vowel-length remained phonemic in Old English much longer than was once thought, I have followed the convention of marking only the length of stressed vowels.[14] Occasionally, texts cited represent a long monophthong with two graphs; on these occasions I add a macron only to the first graph. Marking the phonemic length distinctions between Old English diphthongs is tricky: as Hogg has emphasised, the long diphthongs were probably systematically equivalent in length to a long vowel and can best be thought of as 'normal' diphthongs whose two graphic elements are sufficient to indicate their length; it is the short diphthongs, systematically equivalent in length to a short vowel, which should be marked (with a breve).[15] For typographical convenience, however, in Old English specifically I follow convention in marking the longer diphthongs with a macron on the first element (thus longer *ēa* versus shorter *ea*); but it is important to be clear that *ēa* in Old English corresponds

DOE, s.v. *ælf*, is similar. Perhaps in consequence, Peter R. Kitson, 'How Anglo-Saxon Personal Names Work', *Nomina*, 25 (2002), 91–131, at 105 and n. 25, seems to have inferred a West Saxon singular **ealf* alongside the plural *ylfe*, and alongside the Anglian singular *ælf* a plural **elfe*.

13 Adolf Noreen, *Altnordische Grammatik I: Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik (Laut- und Flexionslehre) unter Berücksichtigung des Urnordischen*, Sammlung kurzer Grammatiken germanischer Dialekte, 4, 4th edn (Halle (Saale): Niemeyer, 1923), §124.3. Cf. Old English *healf*, *wulf*, later Old Icelandic *hálfr*, *úlfr*.

14 R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), esp. 153–68.

15 Richard M. Hogg, *A Grammar of Old English, Volume 1: Phonology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), §2.29.

in length to, for example, *au* in Old Icelandic or Old High German, despite the absence of a length mark in those languages.

I represent phonetic and phonemic reconstructions using the International Phonetic Alphabet; to avoid ambiguities, I base phonemic reconstructions of Common Germanic on the phonology given by Prokosch.[16] Translations are my own unless otherwise stated, and are not intended to have any literary merit. Occasionally, in texts not requiring a full translation, I gloss unfamiliar terms and forms, and false friends, in curly brackets { } to distinguish my interventions from the parentheses and square brackets of authors and editors. Finally, some conventions of capitalisation, mainly for Old Icelandic, can be prejudicial to my investigations: most importantly, one normally reads of *Æsir* and *Vanir*, terms for groups of pagan gods marked by capitalisation as ethnonyms, but of *álfar*, implicitly a race. To maintain these conventions in the present study is untenable. Although it would be most consistent with my arguments to capitalise all terms, it seems less prejudicial and more consistent with the conventions of the primary sources to abandon capitalisation in all cases: thus *æsir*, *vanir*, *álfar*.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL REALITIES

Wið færstice has provided the inspiration for the current scholarly concensus on Anglo-Saxon *ælfe*. It – and, despite his protestations, it alone – was the basis for Singer's statement in his British Academy lecture on 'Early English Magic and Medicine' that

> a large amount of disease was attributed . . . to the action of supernatural beings, elves, Æsir, smiths or witches whose shafts fired at the sufferer produced his torments. Anglo-Saxon and even Middle English literature is replete with the notion of disease caused by the arrows of mischievous supernatural beings. This theory of disease we shall, for brevity, speak of as the *doctrine of the elf-shot*. The Anglo-Saxon tribes placed these malicious elves everywhere, but especially in the wild uncultivated wastes where they loved to shoot at the passer-by.[17]

Singer's comments are the fount of a long tradition, made familiar through the general accounts of medieval popular religion mentioned above. 'In Anglo-Saxon times', Bonser reported, 'diseases were erroneously attributed to many causes which were usually of a supernatural nature . . . The evil was most usually attributed to the elves (who attacked with their arrows) or to "flying venom".'[18] Introduced already into Middle English in 1929 by Müller's

16 E. Prokosch, *A Comparative Germanic Grammar* (Philadelphia: Linguistic Society of America, 1939).

17 Charles Singer, 'Early English Magic and Medicine', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 9 (1919–20), 341–74, at 357; cf. Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, esp. 52–62.

18 Wilfrid Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study in History, Psychology and Folklore*, The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, n.s. 3 (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1963), 158; cf. 'Magical Practices against Elves', *Folk-lore*, 37 (1926), 350–63; 'Survivals of Paganism in Anglo-Saxon England', *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, 56 (1939), 37–70.

emendation of *vluekecche* ('*elf*-cake', apparently denoting an enlargement of the spleen) to *vlueschotte*, the term 'elf-shot' made a late debut in the Old English lexicon in the 1980s as *ælfscot* (the word is actually first attested in Scots, in the the sixteenth century, in the sense 'sharp pain caused by *elvis*').[19] According to Jolly's more recent study of Anglo-Saxon 'elf-charms',

> elves were thought to be invisible or hard-to-see creatures who shot their victims with some kind of arrow or spear, thus inflicting a wound or inducing a disease with no other apparent cause (elfshot). They appear to be lesser spirits than the Æsir deities, but with similar armaments in spears and arrows. . . . This attack by elves was eventually linked with Christian ideas of demons penetrating or possessing animals and people, who then needed exorcism.[20]

More recently again, Pettit noted that 'another airborne menace for man, and especially it seems for beast, was the projectile or *gescot* ("shot") hurled by supernatural creatures, especially elves – the concept of "elf-shot"'.[21]

I tackle this tradition in detail in chapter 4. What is important here is the demonstration that current assessments of *ælfe*'s roles in Anglo-Saxon medicine derive directly from the early twentieth century. Reflecting on that period in her anthropological classic *Purity and Danger*, Douglas observed that

> comparative religion has always been bedevilled by medical materialism. Some argue that even the most exotic of ancient rites have a sound hygienic basis. Others, though agreeing that primitive ritual has hygiene for its object, take the opposite view of its soundness. For them a great gulf divides our sound ideas of hygiene from the primitive's erroneous fancies.[22]

Douglas's objection to derogation and demythologisation alike was that, adopting these approaches, we fail consciously to orientate our own cultural perspectives in relation to the cultures being studied.[23] In both of the approaches which she outlined, the world-view of the student is imposed on the source material, which is, probably inevitably, found wanting. Both approaches occur in the historiography of Anglo-Saxon medicine. Falling into the second of Douglas's camps, Singer and others considered Anglo-Saxon medicine 'a mass of folly and credulity'.[24] However, since the 1960s

[19] G. Müller (ed.), *Aus mittelenglischen Medizintexten: Die Prosarezepte des stockholmer Miszellan Kodex X.90*, Kölner anglistische Arbeiten, 10 (Cologne: Kölner anglistische Arbeiten, 1929), 89; C. Lecouteux, 'Mara–ephialtes–incubus: Le couchemar chez les peuples germaniques', *Études germaniques*, 42 (1987), 1–24, at 17–19; Michael Swanton, 'Die altenglische Judith: Weiblicher Held oder frauliche Heldin', in *Heldensage und Heldendichtung im Germanischen*, ed. Heinrich Beck, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde, 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), pp. 289–304, at 297; Alaric Hall, 'Getting Shot of Elves: Healing, Witchcraft and Fairies in the Scottish Witchcraft Trials', *Folklore*, 116 (2005), 19–36, at 23–4 (quoted below, p. 103); preprint available at <http://www.alarichall.org.uk>.

[20] *Popular Religion*, 134; cf. Karen Louise Jolly, 'Elves in the Psalms? The Experience of Evil from a Cosmic Perspective', in *The Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russell*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions, 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 19–44, at 20, 26.

[21] *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, I xxxiii.

[22] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 30.

[23] *Purity and Danger*, esp. 30–6, 74–8.

[24] Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 92; cf. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 2–3; Anne

scholars have increasingly revealed the deep Latin learning underlying many Anglo-Saxon medical texts.[25] Cameron in particular has argued that many remedies contained clinically effective ingredients, and that from the perspective of Western clinical medicine, Anglo-Saxons' 'prescriptions were about as good as anything prescribed before the mid-twentieth century'.[26] As Glosecki has pointed out, however, Cameron's work is for all its merits a case-study in medical materialism.[27] Thus Cameron, despite his lip-service to the psychological importance of ritual, found himself struggling to divide remedies into 'rational' and 'amuletic' categories.[28] Cameron argued that 'we should . . . put ourselves as far as possible in the Anglo-Saxons' place, and . . . arrive at our assessments through the medical and physiological background of their time, not of ours'.[29] But for historians to try to abandon their own belief-systems is a hopeless endeavour, leaving them and their audiences to impose their preconceptions unconsciously on the material studied.[30] Moreover, Brennessel, Drout and Gravel have recently argued on the basis of experimental evidence that Anglo-Saxon remedies which Cameron supposed to have been clinically efficacious in fact probably were not, but one would not wish to conclude from this that we should return to Singer's perspectives.[31] Facing the approaches to healing which differ between our societies' and Anglo-Saxons' – of which *ælfe* are symptomatic – offers a different way into producing a more comprehensive and plausible assessment of Anglo-Saxon healing. *Ælfe* are neither to be explained away or ignored, nor are they to be reconstructed by imposing unwarranted assumptions upon the evidence, or by repeating those of earlier scholarship.

Douglas's observations on the anthropology of medicine apply, *mutatis mutandis*, generally in the study of past societies: to avoid either dismissing past societies 'as irrational or as unworthy of serious historical consideration', or dismissing evidence contradicting the assumption that their members 'must "really" have thought in the same ways as we do', we need to invoke the concept of world-views.[32] By *world-view* I mean the sum of the conceptual

Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies: The Old English Herbarium and Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 35–54.

25 See Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 99–102.

26 Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 117. Cf. Peter Dendle, 'Lupines, Manganese, and Devil-Sickness: An Anglo-Saxon Medical Response to Epilepsy', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 75 (2001), 91–101.

27 Stephen O. Glosecki, '"Blow these vipers from me": Mythic Magic in *The Nine Herbs Charm*', in *Essays on Old, Middle, Modern English and Old Icelandic in Honour of Raymond P. Tripp, Jr.*, ed. Loren C. Gruber (Lewiston NY: Mellen, 2000), pp. 91–123, at 92–3.

28 Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 134, 157–8; as Tom Sjöblom, *Early Irish Taboos: A Study in Cognitive History*, Uskontotiede / Comparative Religion, 5 (Helsinki: Department of Comparative Studies, University of Helsinki, 2000), 61, has emphasised, it is *a priori* unlikely that early-medieval people were any less rational than we are.

29 *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 3–4, at 4.

30 Cf. Aaron Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, ed. Jana Howlett (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 6–9.

31 Barbara Brennessel, Michael D. C. Drout and Robyn Gravel, 'A Reassesment of the Efficacy of Anglo-Saxon Medicine', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 34 (2005), 183–95.

32 Peter Burke, 'Strengths and Weaknesses of the History of Mentalities', in *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), pp. 162–82 (rev. from *History of European Ideas*, 7 (1986),

categories which members of a society impose on the physical reality in which they exist. This is itself problematic, as it implies a monolithic conception of society to which I do not subscribe. Rhetorically, the problem can be circumvented in part simply by using indefinite plurals such as *world-views* and *Anglo-Saxons*; but this is not a complete solution, and I return to the problem below. My guiding assumption is that within Anglo-Saxon world-views, *ælfe* were a 'social reality'.[33] They were not an objective reality, like houses and trees, which can be readily perceived in the physical world and, insofar as anything can be, objectively proven to exist. But, just as many societies accept the existence of the Christian God, a critical mass of Anglo-Saxons accepted the reality of *ælfe*, and this collective belief made *ælfe* a social reality. Social realities are not mere fantasies: individuals cannot wish them away, any more than Beowulf could the dragon; *ælfe* could have played a significant role both in societies' constructions of the world and individuals' constructions of experience. Indeed, what looks like a social reality from an outsider's perspective may become an objective reality as the outsider becomes an insider.[34] The insider's perspective on *ælfe* can no longer be experienced, and I must simply admit my disbelief in *ælfe*'s objective reality, while accepting that Anglo-Saxons' experiences could have been construed as experiences of *ælfe*. In this perspective, since there was no objective reality forcing societies to recognise the existence of *ælfe* – only cultural and social impulses – the study of *ælfe* is potentially especially illuminating for Anglo-Saxon culture and society: *ælfe* were, amongst other things, reflections and abstractions of Anglo-Saxons' changing ideals and concerns.

CATEGORISATION, THE LEXICON AND COMPARISON

I have claimed to be studying Anglo-Saxons' world-views, and have put categorisation at the centre of my definition of *world-view*. Crucially, the category which this study investigates is not externally defined – 'superstitions', 'monsters', 'pagan gods' or the like – but is based instead on a word, *ælf*. This involves two premises. To reconstruct early-medieval concepts and conceptual categories, we should build our reconstructions up from our primary evidence, rather than positing categories and then seeking evidence for them. Meanwhile, one system of categorisation, providing valid insights into world-view, is a culture's vernacular language.

The theoretical importance of reconstructing medieval conceptual categories rigorously on the basis of primary evidence – from the bottom up, as it were – is neatly illustrated by the recent *Thesaurus of Old English*.

439–51), at 169.

33 For the seminal discussion see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Allen Lane, 1967); also John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Allen Lane, 1995).

34 Edith Turner, 'The Reality of Spirits', in *Shamanism: A Reader*, ed. Graham Harvey (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 145–52 (first publ. *ReVision*, 15 (1992), 28–32).

While an important achievement, this work proceeds from the top down, positing lexical categories based on Roget's *Thesaurus*, and using Bosworth and Toller's dictionary definitions to situate Old English words within them.[35] This is the main *Thesaurus* entry concerning *ælf*:

16. The extrasensorial world
16.01 A divine being
16.01.03 A spectre, ghost, demon, goblin
16.01.03.04 Elfin race: Ælfcynn^{o}
.Elf, goblin, etc.: ælf(en), pūca^{g}, pūcel^{og}
..Of elves: ælfisc^{og}
..Mountain elf: beorgælfen^{q}, dūnælf(en), muntælfen^{og}
..Field elf: feldælfen^{g}, landælf^{og}
..Wood elf: wuduælfen^{g}, wudumær^{g}, wuduwāsa^{g}
..Water elf: sæælfen^{g}, wæterælfen^{g}
..Nightmare caused by elf: ælfādl^{o}, ælfsiden
.An incubus: ælf, mera
.A succubus: lēof[36]

Notwithstanding a few points of fact, my concern is with the entry's assumptions about categorisation.[37] One wonders first what an 'Elfin race' is. The term is presumably intended concisely to render something like 'the races of *ælfe* and like beings', but its members are a motley collection. The ghost-word *mera* is presumably included because Bosworth and Toller defined both it and *ælf* with *incubus*; *wudumær*, attested only to gloss the name of the nymph Echo, perhaps appears because *ælfen*, derived from *ælf*, likewise glosses only words for nymphs.[38] One imagines that *lēof* ('beloved') is included because it once glosses *succuba*, being taken therefore as a feminine counterpart to words for *incubus*, and so also to denote an 'Elfin' being.[39] This being so, one wonders why *mære* was excluded, being categorised instead under *02.05.04.02 A dream*, especially as its strong variant *wudumær* and its putative masculine counterpart *mera* are included in 'Elfin race'. *Mære*'s categorisation as 'a dream' is presumably predicated on its modern survival in *nightmare* rather than its Old English usage, correctly reported by Bosworth and Toller, which permits no serious doubt about *maran*'s corporeality.[40] The inclusion of *wuduwāsa* and *pūca* is mysterious. In short, the *Elfin race* of the *Thesaurus of Old English* is

35 Jane Roberts and Christian Kay, with Lynne Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old English in Two Volumes*, Costerus New Series, 131–2, 2nd rev. impression, 2 vols (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), I xvi–xx (cf. <http://libra.englang.arts.gla.ac.uk/oethesaurus/>, accessed 17 May 2006).

36 Roberts, Kay and Grundy, *Thesaurus of Old English*, I §16.01.03.04.

37 Principally, *ylfig* (defined by Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, s.v. *ilfig*, as 'affected by elves [?], mad, frantic'), seems to have been omitted by mistake. *Mera* is a ghost-word deriving from a scribal corruption of *mære*: Alaric Hall, 'The Evidence for *maran*, the Anglo-Saxon "Nightmares"', *Neophilologus*, (forthcoming), §3. When *feldælfen* was coined, *feld* probably still meant 'open, unobstructed land' (see Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford: Tyas, 2000), 269–74; for the dating of the text see p. 79 below). The interpretation of *ælfisc*, *ælfādl* and *ælfsīden* also requires revision (see pp. 122–3, 105 and chapter 5).

38 Bosworth and Toller, *Dictonary*, s.vv. *mæra*, *ælf*. Cf. Hall, 'The Evidence for *maran*', §5.

39 Ed. Herbert Dean Meritt, *The Old English Prudentius Glosses at Boulogne-sur-Mer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 41 [no. 395].

40 *Dictionary*, s.v. *mære*.

neither an Old English nor an Anglo-Saxon category.

These objections, however, might apply to the *Thesaurus*'s implementation rather than to its premises. More telling, then, are the assumptions built into the *Thesaurus*'s structure. *Ælfe* are located in an 'extrasensorial world'. However, while we might infer an extrasensorial world in Christian Anglo-Saxon world-views, it is not evident that *ælfe* belonged there; on the contrary, the evidence suggests that they were to be found in the tangible world. The use of *divine being* may be justifiable, but divinity is an ideologically charged concept whose applicability to non-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture is not self-evident. Some texts might justify the inclusion of *ælf* under 'spectre, ghost, demon, goblin', but others attest to quite different meanings, while we might question whether spectres, ghosts, demons and goblins, insofar as these words are applicable to Anglo-Saxon concepts at all, would have been grouped in this way by Anglo-Saxons. My focus on one word is intended to circumvent the problems inherent in defining conceptual categories first and asking questions later. I seek to judge with what words *ælf* overlapped semantically, and with what words it was systematically contrasted, by tracing these patterns in the primary evidence.

That said, I do sometimes limit the scope of my investigation by employing an analytical category of the 'supernatural', using *supernatural* in what seems to me its usual modern English usage: to denote phenomena viewed as transcending (or transgressing) normal (or natural) existence, as defined by the subject's observation of everyday life, and of what is possible in it. This demands justification, not least because Neville has recently argued that 'on a basic level the Anglo-Saxons did not have a word or expression for the modern conception of the natural world because they did not conceive of an entity defined by the exclusion of the supernatural'.[41] Neville had the Anglo-Saxons distinguishing only between the human world and the natural world, aligning beings such as monsters with the latter.[42] Likewise, the etymologising objection that *supernatural* is paradoxical, as everything is included in nature, such that nothing can be 'above' it, has proved surprisingly tenacious given that it is precisely the paradox which it seeks to deny that gives *supernatural* its significance.[43]

The validity of a category of the supernatural is supported for Anglo-Saxon England by a variety of evidence. Mearns in particular has argued for the analytical power, and validity, of the category regarding the Old English

41 Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 27 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2–3; cf. Neil S. Price, *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*, Aun, 31 (Uppsala: Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2002), 244, on Scandinavia.

42 *Representations*, esp. 2–3, 31–5, 70–4.

43 For example, J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 109–61 (first publ. in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (Oxford, 1947)), at 110; C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 64–8; Ármann Jakobsson, 'History of the Trolls? *Bárðar saga* as an Historical Narrative', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 25 (1998), 53–71, at 54–5; Neville, *Representations*, 71–3 *et passim*.

lexicon.[44] Despite Neville's claims, Old English had a substantial lexicon of the otherworldly, prominently involving the prefix *el-* 'foreign, strange; from elsewhere'.[45] In practice, Neville herself used the term *supernatural*, particulary in discussing *Beowulf*.[46] In the context of comparative religion, moreover, it seems unlikely that we can viably maintain the Christian theological convention (attested amongst both Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Saxonists) of placing the Christian God outside nature rather than considering him supernatural.[47] Neville's exclusion of Christian divinity from her conception of the supernatural world resulted in a strict focus on monsters, producing a reading in which Anglo-Saxons viewed nature and the supernatural solely as threats to humanity.[48] But this overlooks the mediating role of Christian supernatural forces, such as nature miracles, in Anglo-Saxon literature. I argue for subtler reconstructions of the relationship between Anglo-Saxons and their world, to which the concept of the supernatural is central and powerful.[49]

Turning to the second premise of my methodology, that linguistic categorisation is an important component in world-view, the principle at least of taking care over establishing the meanings of the words which comprise our source-texts will meet no objection – though our limited evidence means that we must often speak tentatively of *ælf*'s semantic 'associations', without always being able to specify whether these are denotations, connotations or patterns of collocation. What is less straightforward is my use of lexical semantics as a basis for mapping Anglo-Saxon beliefs. The potential of words to attest to beliefs was of course realised long ago, underpinning Grimm's seminal, and largely unsurpassed, *Deutsche Mythologie*.[50] But since the heady days of Grimm's linguistic nationalism, or the seminal propositions of semantic field theory and linguistic determinism in the 1920s and '30s, the theoretical validity of this approach has been questioned.[51] A prelinguistic child can have a concept of a house; people perceive the difference between red and pink when their language uses one word of both; I may say that I am angry, while acknowledging that no word precisely denotes my experience. Thus the medievalist who would, for want of alternative data, use the lexis as evidence

44 Adam Jonathan Mearns, 'The Lexical Representation of Monsters and Devils in Old English Literature', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2002), 101, 108–37, esp. 123–7.

45 *DOE*, s.v. *el-*.

46 For example, *Representations*, 73, 118.

47 On Anglo-Saxons see Neville, *Representations*, 170–7; for an explicit Anglo-Saxonist Lewis, *Studies*, 64–8.

48 Especially *Representations*, 107–9.

49 There is also reason to think that a concept of the supernatural as I have defined it – or the 'counter-intuitive' as researchers in the emergent cognitive science of religion have termed it – is a natural consequence of human cognitive processes, as universal as language; but these claims are still at an emergent stage. See for example Justin L. Barrett, 'Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 4 (2000), 29–34; Pascal Boyer, 'Religious Thought and Behaviour as By-products of Brain Function', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 7 (2003), 119–24.

50 Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. James Steven Stallybrass, 4 vols (London: Bell, 1882–8) (first publ. *Deutsche Mythologie*, 4th edn, 3 vols (Berlin: Meyer, 1875–8)).

51 See John Lyons, *Semantics*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), I 245–61.

for past world-views is in an uncomfortable position. In the cognitive sciences, debate over the extent of linguistic determinism is ongoing, and experiment has focused on issues of limited relevance here: grammatical categorisation and encoding of spatial relationships; closed lexical sets such as colour-terms; or the role of language in learning to perform tasks.[52] In the face of these problems, linguistically minded medievalists have generally either simply ignored the theoretical difficulties, or avoided making any assertions about the relevance of their linguistic studies to past societies.[53] Thus, surveying approaches to medieval popular religion, Lees commented that 'these studies do not conform to one methodological or theoretical school. They are instead feminist, historical, materialist, psychoanalytic, cultural, theological, and literary'.[54] Lees's list is catholic, but linguistics is absent.

Fortunately, linguistic determinism is not a theoretical prerequisite for the integration of lexical semantics into wider cultural research. There is instead a well-established and theoretically justified supposition that language reflects culture, which is sufficient to underpin the methods adopted here. This, as a generalisation, can hardly be denied – if language did not reflect culture then it would be an absurdly ineffectual tool for communication.[55] People can of course conceive of things for which they lack words, and the absence of a word does not prove the absence of corresponding concepts. However, it is reasonable to suppose *a priori* that the distribution of words in a lexicon attests to the relative cultural salience of the concepts which they denote, with absences at least suggesting low salience.[56]

That said, social realities specifically are arguably particularly susceptible to construction, and so to study, through language. Pending conclusive experimental evidence on the subject, I accept Searle's argument that by definition, social realities cannot exist without symbols:

> symbols do not create cats and dogs and evening stars; they create only the possibility of referring to cats, dogs, and evening stars in a publicly accessible way. But symbolization creates the very ontological categories of money, property, points scored in games and political offices, as well as the categories of words, and speech acts.[57]

52 For recent surveys see the articles in Dedre Gentner and Susan Goldin-Meadow (ed.), *Language in Mind: Advances in the Study of Language and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003) and Marie T. Banich and Molly Mack (ed.), *Mind, Brain, and Language: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003).

53 For the former case see for example D. H. Green, *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); on the latter see Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 131, 159 n. 66, 425–6. An important exception on both counts is Earl R. Anderson, *Folk-Taxonomies in Early English* (Madison [NJ]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003).

54 Clare A. Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Medieval Cultures, 19 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.

55 Cf. Berger and Luckman, *Social Construction*, esp. 49–61.

56 Lyons, *Semantics*, 1 246–50.

57 Searle, *Construction*, esp. 59–78, at 75.

And as Searle argued, the symbol-system *par excellence* is language. This observation can be developed at several levels. As Berger and Luckmann emphasised, language influences how people communicate their thoughts and so how communities construct their shared realities.[58] Language not only reflects societies' world-views, therefore, but affects their form at a social level. However idiosyncratic an individual's experience, it will tend to be communicated and constructed within the community through the linguistic resources at the community's disposal. Beyond this, however, there is a case to be made that, as social realities, *ælfe* existed through the word *ælf*; it follows that, as a general principle, an *ælf* was what the word *ælf* meant. By reconstructing the semantics of the word, we can reconstruct the ontological category. This is not an entirely simple claim: it is possible that beliefs in supernatural beings are a natural by-product of human cognitive processes, and so might exist without language.[59] But it also seems that across cultures, all concepts of such beings have lexical labels: it is reasonable to argue that the culturally specific characteristics of a class of supernatural beings will be constructed through language, and that in studying lexical evidence, we are viewing not only reflections of beliefs, but media of beliefs.[60]

As scholars from various disciplines have argued, of course, 'No particular set of classifying symbols can be understood in isolation, but there can be hope of making sense of them in relation to the total structure of classifications in the culture in question'.[61] This study, then, is not only about *ælfe*, but about how the concept of *ælfe* related to other Anglo-Saxon conceptual categories. Language is well suited to this kind of investigation. Though we have few Anglo-Saxon non-Christian mythological narratives, Old English texts containing *ælf* are relatively rich in evidence for linguistic systems – for the overlaps and contrasts in meaning between *ælf* and other words. The correlation of linguistic structures with mythological categorisation has been demonstrated in the traditional grammatical structuring of the Australian aboriginal language Dyirbal, and can be argued for in the correlation of grammatical gender and cultural gender in Indo-European and other languages.[62] In the present study, it is medieval Scandinavia which provides the test case, since there we can not only map belief through words, but check to see how well their semantics correlate with fuller mythological texts (chapter 1).

For all the value of our Old English textual and linguistic evidence, however, it would be hard (and unwise) to interpret the evidence for *ælfe* without reference to a broader cultural context – as my mention of medieval Scandinavian

58 *Social Construction*, esp. 51–2.

59 See n. 48 above.

60 Cf. Pascal Boyer, 'Evolution of the Modern Mind and the Origins of Culture: Religious Concepts as a Limiting Case', in *Evolution and the Human Mind: Modularity, Language and Meta-Cognition*, ed. P. Carruthers and A. Chamberlain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101–2.

61 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, vii.

62 George Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 92–104; Anne Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. 19–30.

evidence suggests. A context is necessary to give a sense of what interpretations of the linguistic evidence are plausible, and to assist the assessment of their wider significance. Here I use comparative material of two main types, linguistic and narrative – the former primarily as a direct source of semantic evidence, the latter primarily as a source of interpretative models. Both of these uses go back to the pioneering linguistic and folkloric research of the nineteenth century; my approaches here differ mainly in the degree of caution exercised as to what is suitable for comparison and what we can infer from it. My comparative linguistic material comprises medieval Germanic cognates of *ælf* and other pertinent Old English words. No interpretation of the Old English evidence should make cognate evidence unduly difficult to explain; additionally, correspondences between cognate evidence and Old English evidence can be used to suggest positively what interpretation of the Old English material is most plausible. Comparative narrative material, on the other hand, is rarely useful as direct evidence, as our lack of relevant Anglo-Saxon narratives precludes the comparison of like material with like. But narratives in which *ælf* appeared must not only have helped to determine the word's meanings, but also the cultural meanings of *ælfe*. Narratives in medieval Norse, Irish, French and later English and Scots, then, can show what kinds of narratives *ælf*'s semantics are likely to have related to, providing models for the interpretation of semantic data. Although in theory narratives from any culture could provide these models, I have focused on those from medieval north-western Europe. This reflects my specialisms, but also provides a proximate reading context for the Old English evidence. With due care to avoid circularity of argument, we can use these narratives both to help to reconstruct Anglo-Saxon beliefs, and to see what is distinctive about them in their historical and cultural context.

One kind of comparative source is, regrettably, unavailable here, however: art history. Visual art might in theory have been important in shaping Anglo-Saxon beliefs – Buxton could argue of Ancient Greece, for example, that 'for the development of the mythological tradition artistic representations were not merely *as* important as verbal narratives, but *more* important'.[63] One thinks also of the functions of pictures in Anglo-Saxon Christianity and of early-medieval Scandinavian picture-stones and tapestries – our earliest attestation of *álfr*, indeed, comes from a poetic response to the decoration of a shield, Bragi Boddason's *Ragnarsdrápa*.[64] But it is not, at present, possible to identify any images or motifs with *ælfe*: the one traditional candidate proves to be a conventional depiction of demons.[65] Strange beasts and monsters are prominent in early Anglo-Saxon art and demand to be understood within

63 Richard Buxton, *Imaginary Greece: The Contexts of Mythology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 15 n. 24.

64 See p. 28; Barbara Raw, 'Pictures: The Books of the Unlearned?', in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching*, ed. Paul Cavill (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 103–19; Philip Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1993), s.v. *Viking Art: Pictorial art*.

65 Jolly, 'Elves'.

a wider literary and linguistic context, but pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon art, where non-Christian beliefs might most clearly appear, tends to be very abstract, and its significances fiendishly hard to deduce.[66] The Franks Casket does depict Weland, whose Scandinavian counterpart Vǫlundr can be identified as an *álfr*, and Weland~Vǫlundr appears on Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture.[67] But to equate depictions of this sort with *álfar* or *ælfe* would be risky.

FOLKLORE, BELIEF AND EVIDENCE

It remains to discuss some general issues in studying historical belief-systems: my assumptions about their dynamic and variable character; and the sections of Anglo-Saxon society to whose beliefs our evidence for *ælfe* pertains. I work on the premise that our texts are not merely articulations or reflections of belief: they were and remain active participants in a discourse of belief conducted both between the members of textual communities, and between the communities and their texts. The better to appreciate this perspective, we may consider some of the opening comments in Henderson and Cowan's significant *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History*:

> researching Scottish fairy belief is rather like confronting a huge obscure painting which has been badly damaged and worn through time, great chunks totally obliterated and now completely irrecoverable, portions repainted by poorly skilled craftsmen, and other parts touched up by those who should have known better . . . In assembling this material, we have not worked toward some deconstructionist end, but rather have tried to synthesise the individual components, to reconstruct the whole essence of fairy belief as a distinct phenomenon.[68]

This evocative statement undeniably strikes a chord. It is in the tradition of folkloristics which abandoned the early-nineteenth-century model of the production of folk literature – in which ancient traditions were inherited and bequeathed almost unconsciously by some undifferentiated 'folk' – to invoke instead the 'tradition bearer'.[69] This model improved on its forebears

[66] On monsters in art see Peter Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3–67; on their abstractness Jane Hawkes, 'Symbolic Lives: The Visual Evidence', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. John Hines, Studies in Archaeoethnology, 2 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 311–44.

[67] James T. Lang, 'Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England', *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 48 (1976), 83–94, at 90–3; reproductions of the Franks Casket are many, one example being Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), between pp. 116 and 117; see further pp. 39–47 below.

[68] Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2001), 5–6.

[69] See Bengt Holbek, *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales: Danish Folklore in a European Perspective*, FF Communications, 239 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1987), esp. 23–45; Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, rev. repr. (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), 3–22; Timothy R. Tangherlini, *Interpreting Legend: Danish Storytellers and their Repertoires* (New York: Garland, 1994), 29–53.

by positing that folk-traditions were transmitted by individual members of society. But, as the quotation shows, it also introduced a new note of doubt: with the introduction of the humanly fallible 'tradition bearer', the quality of the transmission of folklore seemed less assured.

However, in keeping with recent arguments that 'man is not a cog in the wheel of history but an active participant in the historical process' or that 'it is *speakers*, not *languages*, that innovate', Tangherlini has argued that a superior model in folkloristics is that of 'tradition participants'.[70] Scottish fairy belief may never have looked much more coherent than it does now: our 'obscure painting' need not represent degradation by faulty tradition bearers, but the dynamic and variable nature of tradition itself. The consequence of these theoretical approaches is the optimistic conclusion that although Anglo-Saxons encountered more, and more varied, resources for constructing their *ælf*-lore than now remain to us, the processes of construction were fundamentally similar: Anglo-Saxons encountered the word *ælf* and surmised its significance, primarily, from the linguistic and discursive contexts in which it appeared. Texts mentioning *ælfe* were not merely expressions of belief, but became in turn part of the material from which tradition participants constructed and transmitted their own conceptions of the beliefs involved. Those which survive are not windows on to past beliefs, but pathways into them. Moreover, unlike our traditional starting-points for reconstructing beliefs concerning non-Christian supernatural beings – (archi)episcopal denunciations like Wulfstan of York's, collections of legends from disparate times and places like Gervase of Tilbury's, or mythographies like Snorri Sturluson's – most of the sources I use here here were probably not intended to be formative. Glossators trying to elucidate Latin texts had little incentive to deploy Old English terms in wilfully unusual ways and compilers of medical texts included remedies for what they perceived to be real threats.

These comments should suggest that I avoid what Boyer has called 'the *theologistic* bias in cultural anthropology' – the idea that 'the religious representations of a given group, "culture", or "society" constitute an integrated and consistent set of abstract principles'.[71] Certainly, I endeavour to detect variation and change in our evidence. Although changes in the meanings of Old English words have been studied, it is more usual in studies of English semantic change to take Old English as one, effectively synchronic, stage in the history of English. Since most surviving Old English manuscripts were written in conservative literary registers over just two centuries, this is understandable. However, this habit disengages linguistic evidence from historical change. The present study, therefore, pays careful attention to our evidence, slight though it is, for variation over time. However, I am, like most

[70] Respectively Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology*, 12; James Milroy, *Linguistic Variation and Change: On the Historical Sociolinguistics of English*, Language in Society, 19 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 169; Tangherlini, *Interpreting Legend*, 29–33; cf. Peter Burke, 'Unity and Variety in Cultural History', in *Varieties of Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), pp. 183–212, at 188–9, 195–7.

[71] Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), 40.

scholars, also concerned to systematise, on the principle of economy: to see how far our varied kinds of texts, and their various implications, can plausibly be seen as the product of a limited and cohesive set of beliefs; and to detect and interpret variation and change through this process. The tension between these two stances, neatly encapsulated in McKinnell's characterisation of 'late Norse heathenism' as 'both one and many', is inevitable.[72] It is analogous to the position of a grammarian who must abstract a system or systems from a partial selection of surface evidence, in the knowledge that grammar in fact varies according to time, space, community, context and even individual speaker. I, like the grammarian, hope that I have succeeded in abstracting systems which represent what most members of a community would exhibit in their shared discourse.

Like the grammarian too, however, I can specify to what sections of society my data, and therefore my inferences, pertain. My discussion in this section has drawn on thinking about what we habitually call 'folklore', 'popular belief' or 'popular religion'. At first sight, these seem natural labels for a study concerned with *ælfe*. But they are not. The usefulness of the concept of popular belief regarding Anglo-Saxon culture is questionable – because it is either inapplicable or untraceable.[73] While it is evident that learned clergymen had access to different systems of belief, and lay aristocrats more access to clergymen, than the rest of the population, it is not clear that we should hypothesise a division between 'popular' and 'elite' cultures even for early-modern Europe, let alone for Anglo-Saxon England with its far slighter social stratification.[74] Conversely, most of our evidence for *ælfe* derives from texts produced by a small, learned, clerical, male, Southumbrian and probably noble section of Anglo-Saxon society. Even the personal names containing *ælf* are those of the nobility. If, then, we do posit a division between Anglo-Saxon popular and elite culture, there is no question that our evidence represents the elite. Nor can the attestation of similar beliefs among the peasantry in later times confirm their widespread character, as this could be because of an earlier trickle-down process rather than a once-homogeneous belief-system. So although Jolly saw the study of 'popular religion in late Saxon England' as a way of putting 'elf-charms in context', the evidence concerning *ælfe* is 'popular' or 'folkloric' only insofar as we habitually abuse these terms to refer to beliefs which do not fit post-Reformation expectations of orthodox Christian belief.

One is entitled to wonder whether linguistic evidence might, despite its provenance from a limited section of society, attest better to wider beliefs. As a given language is often a medium of communication across all sections of society, the meanings of words might be more consistent across social divisions than other features of culture. This possibility rests on questions

[72] John McKinnell, *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variation in Late Norse Heathenism* (Rome: Il calamo, 1994).

[73] Cf. Catherine Cubitt, 'Sites and Sanctity: Revisiting the Cult of Murdered and Martyred Anglo-Saxon Royal Saints', *Early Medieval Europe*, 9 (2000), 53–83, at 55–7.

[74] Burke, *Popular Culture*, esp. 3–64.

concerning the effects of social divisions in Anglo-Saxon society on language, and on the nature of the interplay between language and belief. But historical sociolinguistics is a nascent discipline, whose major advances so far relate to later periods.[75] While evidence is growing for the differences between the lexica of the learned and unlearned in the Anglo-Saxon historical period, we have next to no idea about the effects of other sorts of social division on Old English.[76] Even disregarding the possibility of social register prior to the Anglo-Saxon migrations and the later complications of Scandinavian settlement and the Norman Conquest, we could posit the swift growth of Old English registers following the Anglo-Saxon migrations as society grew more stratified, dialects gained and lost prestige as kingdoms competed for influence over one another, and arguably as varieties of Old English characterised by substrate influence from earlier languages developed.[77] Accordingly, hints have begun to be identified to this effect in our evidence for late Old English phonology.[78] It would therefore be unwise at the present

75 See Tim William Machan, *English in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg, *Historical Sociolinguistics: Language Change in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 2003), esp. 1–25, 133–5; cf. Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

76 For learned lexica see for example C. P. Biggam, 'Sociolinguistic Aspects of OE Colour Lexemes', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 24 (1995), 51–65. Our best evidence for phonological variation is Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, iv.22, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, corr. repr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 402 – but this is tantamount to an admission of ignorance. See also René Derolez, 'Good and Bad Old English', in *The History and the Dialects of English: Festschrift for Eduard Kolb*, ed. Andreas Fischer, Anglistische Forschungen, 203 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1989), pp. 91–102; R. Derolez, 'Anglo-Saxon Glossography: A Brief Introduction', in *Anglo-Saxon Glossography: Papers Read at the International Conference Held in the Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Brussels, 8 and 9 September 1986*, ed. R. Derolez (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten, 1992), pp. 9–42.

77 On stratification see Heinrich Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Social Structure', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. John Hines, Studies in Archaeoethnology, 2 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 125–70, esp. 141–7. Thomas E. Toon, *The Politics of Early Old English Sound Change* (New York: Academic Press, 1983) argued for Mercian influence on Kentish speech, but his findings have not generally been accepted (see Kathryn A. Lowe, 'On the Plausibility of Old English Dialectology: The Ninth-Century Kentish Charter Material', *Folia Linguistica Historica*, 22 (2001), 136–70). Jeremy J. Smith, 'The Origins of Old English Breaking', in *And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche: Essays on Medieval English Presented to Professor Matsuji Tajima on his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Yoko Iyeiri and Margaret Connolly (Tokyo: Kaibunsha, 2002), pp. 39–50, positing Anglian influence on West Saxon, may fare better. See also Mechthild Gretsch, 'The Junius Psalter Gloss: Its Historical and Cultural Context', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 29 (2000), 85–121, esp. 89–106. The prospect of substrate Brittonic influence long foundered on the dearth of lexical borrowings into Old English. But new approaches to the subject suggest the possibility of grammatical influence: see the studies in Markku Filppula, Juhani Klemola and Heli Pitkänen (ed.), *The Celtic Roots of English*, Studies in Languages, 37 (Joensuu: University of Joensuu, Faculty of Humanities, 2002).

78 Alaric Hall, 'Old MacDonald had a *Fyrm*, *eo*, *eo*, *y*: Two Marginal Developments of <eo> in Old and Middle English', *Quaestio: Selected Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic*, 2 (2001), 60–90, esp. 84; available at <http://www.alarichall.org.uk>, <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/2890/>. Gretsch has argued in addition that the gloss *burhspǣce* for *urbanitatis* presupposes differences in speech between (certain) inhabitants of a *burh* and others (*Intellectual Foundations*, 164). I am not confident, however, that *burhspǣc* has not merely calqued its first element (*burh*, 'stronghold, city') on the *urbs* ('city') implicit in *urbanitas*, as

stage of research to make assumptions about the value of our Old English evidence for the beliefs of social groups other than the elite producers and consumers of that evidence. This book is a study of elite beliefs, elucidating something of their changing meanings and functions, and emphasising the extent to which Christian Anglo-Saxon culture included or incorporated traditional ideologies.

with other Old English words which add a derivative or translation of their source word to a suitable epexegetic element, such as place-names in *-ceaster* like *Binchester* (< *Vinovia*) or plant-names in *-wyrt* like *nædderwyrt* (apparently calqued on the plant-name *viperina*, < *viper* 'snake' or *basilisca* < *basiliscus* 'basilisk, lizard').

1

A Medieval Scandinavian Context

PRIMARILY because of Icelanders' late conversion, linguistic conservatism and readiness to transmit literature rooted in pre-conversion culture, Scandinavia has provided the basis for research into all traditional Germanic-speaking cultures. Accordingly, reconstructions of *ælfe* have often been shaped by evidence for the medieval Scandinavian *álfar*. However, it would be unwise to impose Scandinavian evidence incautiously on other cultures. If only for historiographical reasons, then, any reassessment of Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* must begin with the reassessment of their Scandinavian cousins. I begin here by showing how the traditional point of departure for reconstructing pre-Christian Scandinavian beliefs, Snorri Sturluson's writings, is unreliable regarding early *álfar*. Later-medieval Icelandic texts also afford evidence for the meanings of *álfr*, but these are even trickier as evidence for pre-conversion beliefs, so I include them here only on a few specific points, focusing instead on poetry which seems likely to be old or culturally conservative, and which afforded Snorri's own main primary source material.[1]

After discussing Snorri's work, I turn to skaldic verse, the Scandinavian praise-poetry first attested from the ninth century. The association of skaldic poetry with named poets and subjects permits the cautious dating of poems, the reliability of the dates being somewhat assured by the poems' intricate metre and diction, which inhibited recomposition in oral transmission. Next I consider Eddaic verse, whose mythological subject matter makes it in some ways more useful than skaldic verse, but whose more flexible structures permitted greater variability in transmission, so precluding precise dating. In addition to providing this primary evidence, however, Old Norse

[1] For references see *DONP*, s.vv. *alfr* and its compounds; Finnur Jónsson, *Ordbog til de af Samfund til udg. ad gml. nord. litteratur udgivne rímur samt til de af Dr. O. Jiriczek udgivne Bósarimur*, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 51 (Copenhagen: Jørgensen, 1926–8), s.vv. *álfkona*, *álfr*; Inger M. Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 27 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966), 104–7 [F200–399]; Lotte Motz, 'Of Elves and Dwarves', *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 29–30 (1973–4), 313–20, at 97–8, 100–1; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *The Folk Stories of Iceland*, rev. by Einar G. Pétursson, trans. Benedikt Benedikz, ed. Anthony Faulkes, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series, 16 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), 170–5; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, 'Folk Narrative and Norse Mythology', *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 46 (1990), 115–22, at 120–2; 'The Testimony of Waking Consciousness and Dreams in Migratory Legends concerning Human Encounters with Hidden People', *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 49 (1993), 123–31; cf. H. F. Feilberg, *Bjærgtagen: Studie over en gruppe træk fra nordisk alfetro*, Danmarks folkeminder, 5 (Copenhagen: Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1910) and the corpus of *huldufólkssögur* maintained by the Orðabók Háskólans at <http://www.lexis.hi.is/ordlyklar/alfar/alfar.htm>.

material, combined with the prominence of anthropological approaches in recent Scandinavian scholarship, affords means to assess the usefulness of linguistic evidence as evidence for mythology and its wider significance in early-medieval Scandinavian world-views. This provides models for interpreting the Old English evidence considered in the subsequent chapters, and a framework for introducing other Scandinavian evidence at appropriate junctures below.

I should admit at the outset that my investigations are male-centred. This is not (consciously) a willing choice, and I focus on gendering in an Anglo-Saxon context below. But females are comparatively poorly represented in our Norse mythological sources, partly defined in any case through their husbands, and partly functioning as units of inter-group exchange rather than as paradigmatic representatives of groups themselves.[2] The early-medieval evidence points only towards male *álfar*. However, supernatural females do crop up at various points below, and it is important to outline my understanding of the words *dís*, *norn* and *valkyrja*, and of their semantic relationships. Essentially, I follow our sources in considering *dís*, *norn*, *valkyrja* partial synonyms with substantially overlapping meaning, taking *dís* to be the most inclusive in meaning. This position is supported by the analyses presented by Ström in 1954, but the convention of creating taxonomies of mythological races on a one-name, one-race basis continues to dominate scholars' thinking.[3] It is usual to follow the preferences of the prose sections of the Poetic Edda, and of *Snorra Edda*, and refer to the supernatural females in early mythology as *valkyrjur* (or *Valkyries*, *Walküren*, etc.). But this is historically surely an inversion: *valkyrja* is most likely a kenning ('chooser of the slain') for *dís* ('(supernatural) lady'), as *dís* is used in, for example, *Grímnismál* stanza 53, *Reginsmál* stanza 24 and *Hamðismál* stanza 28.[4] Even Brynhildr, the archetypal Wagnerian *Walküre*, is referred to as a *dís*, and never in Eddaic verse as a *valkyrja*.[5] Likewise, scholars often talk of 'the three Norns' – but our sources never do. *Norn* simply denotes

2 See especially Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 51–6; Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization, 7, 10, 2 vols ([Odense]: Odense University Press, 1994–8), 1 64–6, 85–186; more generally Carol J. Clover, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 363–87; Elspeth Whitney, 'Witches, Saints and Other "Others": Women and Deviance in Medieval Culture', in *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, ed. Linda E. Mitchell, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 2007 (New York: Garland, 1999), pp. 295–312.

3 Folke Ström, *Diser, norner, valkyrjor: Fruktbarhetskult och sakralt kungadöme i norden*, Kungl. vitterhets historie och antikvitetes akademiens handlingar, filologisk-filosofiska serien, 1 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1954).

4 Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 68, 179, 273; Britt-Mari Näsström, *Freyja: The Great Goddess of the North*, Lund Studies in History of Religions, 5 (Lund: University of Lund, 1995), 125; Ström, *Diser*, esp. 70–9. To Ström's points I would add that *dís* is extensively attested in Old Icelandic verse and is the basis for many kennings, whereas *valkyrja* occurs rather rarely, and is the basis for none: Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis / Ordbog over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*, 2nd edn by Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Møller, 1931), s.vv.; Robert Kellogg, *A Concordance to Eddic Poetry*, Medieval Texts and Studies, 2 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1988).

5 *Sigurðarkviða in meiri*, st. 14, ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 200.

noble and supernatural women.[6] The three *meyjar margs vitandi* who appear in stanza 20 of *Vǫluspá* are identified in scholarship as 'the Norns' only because Snorri says (presumably on the basis of this stanza), 'þar stendr salr einn fagr undir askinum við brunninn, ok ór þeim sal koma þrjár meyjar þær er svá heita: Urðr, Verðandi, Skuld. Þessar meyjar skapa mǫnnum aldr. Þær kǫllum vér nornir' ('a beautiful hall stands there under the ash beside a spring/pool, and from that hall come three maidens who are named thus: Urðr ['become'], Verðandi ['becoming'], Skuld ['will be']. These maidens shape people's lives. We call them *nornir*.').[7] Even Snorri, however, does not attest to 'the Norns', three female shapers of fate: he says rather that these three *meyjar* are *nornir* (moreover, the names he gives them, following *Vǫluspá*, may be inspired by learned knowledge of the Classical *Parcae* rather than by traditional culture).[8] Statements like 'poets use the word *dísir* as if it meant "norns"' invert our evidence.[9] This analysis provides a preliminary example of the importance of reconstructing conceptual categories from the bottom up, but also suggests that we need not approach early-medieval Scandinavian belief looking for elaborate taxonomies of supernatural females.

SNORRI STURLUSON

Snorri Sturluson (born in the late 1170s, dying in 1241) seems to have composed and edited the texts comprising *Snorra Edda*, his treatise on Norse poetry and mythology, more than two centuries after Iceland's official conversion – between perhaps 1220 and 1241 – while much of what we think of as *Snorra Edda* may derive from later editors.[10] *Snorra Edda* comprises four texts: a prologue, *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal*, probably composed in reverse order. It is complemented (and sometimes contradicted) by the partly mythological *Ynglinga saga*, the opening part of *Heimskringla* – the magisterial history of the kings of Norway accepted as having probably been composed by Snorri in the same period as his *Edda*.[11] Both texts are founded on quotations of older verse. Snorri's work is, therefore, a complex blend of old and new, involving preservation, re-interpretation, neatening and misunderstanding

6 Ström, *Diser*, esp. 80–95.

7 Respectively ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 5; Anthony Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 18.

8 Jan De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, Grundriss der germanischen Philologie, 12, 2 vols (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1956–7), 1 272 n. 6; for the similarity of the *parcae* and Snorri's *nornir* see Paul C. Bauschatz, 'Urth's Well', *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 3 (1975), 53–86, at 55, 59–63; for possible Classical influence on *Vǫluspá* see Ursula Dronke (ed. and trans.), *The Poetic Edda, Volume II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93–104.

9 E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 222.

10 Faulkes, *Gylfaginning*, xv, xxix–xxxiii; Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, 2 vols (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 1998), 1 xxxix–l.

11 See Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction*, Viking Society for Northern Research, Text Series, 8 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1991), 13–19.

of inherited traditions by both Snorri himself and his redactors.[12]

Álfr occurs in *Snorra Edda* most often in quotations of Eddaic verse, and in Snorri's prose paraphrases of them. This reveals more about Snorri's sources, which are usually attested more completely elsewhere, than his own views. Snorri's most influential deployment of *álfr*, however, occurs in his own enumeration in *Gylfaginning* of the *høfuðstaðir* ('chief places') of the cosmos:

> Margir staðir eru þar gǫfugligr. Sá er einn staðr þar er kallaðr er Álfheimr. Þar byggvir fólk þat er ljósálfar heita, en døkkálfar búa niðri i jǫrðu, ok eru þeir ólíkr þeim sýnum en myklu ólíkari reyndum. Ljósálfar eru fegri en sól sýnum, en døkkálfar eru svartari en bik.[13]
>
> There are many places there which are magnificent. There is one place which is called *Álfheimr*. A people lives there which is called *ljósálfar*, but *døkkálfar* live below in the earth, and they are different from them in appearance and very different in practice. *Ljósálfar* are more handsome than the sun in appearance, but *døkkálfar* are blacker than pitch.

Ljósálfr ('light-*álfr*') is repeated shortly after, in a detail appended to the description of *Víðbláinn*, the highest of Snorri's three *himnar* ('skies'): 'en ljósálfar einir hyggjum vér at nú byggvi þá staði' ('but we think that the *ljósálfar* alone currently inhabit those places').[14] In addition to *døkkálfar*, Snorri also mentions *Svartálfaheimr* ('black/dark-*álfar*'s-world'): seeking a way to bind the wolf Fenrir, 'sendi Alfǫður þann er Skírnir er nefndr, sendimaðr Freys, ofan í Svartálfaheim til dverga nokkura' ('All-father sent him who is called Skírnir, Freyr's messenger, down into Svartálfaheimr to some *dvergar*').[15] *Ljósálfr* and *døkkálfr* are unique in Old Norse. *Svartálfr* does occur in *Ektors saga ok kappa hans*, from around 1300, but almost certainly by borrowing from *Snorra Edda*.[16] It has been observed before that the *døkkálfar* and *svartálfar* seem to be *dvergar* under new names: their characteristics are identical with *dvergar*'s, and *dvergar* do not otherwise occur in the cosmology of *Gylfaginning*.[17] When in *Skáldskaparmál* Þórr demands that Loki have *svartálfar* make gold hair for his wife, Loki goes to beings otherwise denoted by *dvergr*; Andvari the *dvergr* is found in *Svartálfaheimr*; and Mitchell has argued that the narrative function of the *svartálfar* is best paralleled by the *jǫtnar* of whom Skírnir seeks Gerðr for Freyr in *Skírnismál*, and I align the *jǫtnar* with *dvergar* in the next section.[18] I discount Snorri's *døkkálfar* and *svartálfar* as evidence for earlier *álfar*, then.

[12] The seminal analysis is Anne Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, Skrifter utgift av det Norske Videnskaps-akademi i Oslo, II. Hist.-filos. klasse, ny serie, 4 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964); see also Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, esp. I 32–3, with references; Heather O'Donoghue, 'What Has Baldr to Do with Lamech? The Lethal Shot of a Blind Man in Old Norse Myth and Jewish Exegetical Traditions', *Medium Ævum*, 72 (2003), 82–107.

[13] Ed. Faulkes, *Gylfaginning*, 19.

[14] Ed. Faulkes, *Gylfaginning*, 20.

[15] Ed. Faulkes, *Gylfaginning*, 28.

[16] *DONP*, s.v. *alfs·sonr*.

[17] See Holtsmark, *Studier*, 37–8; Motz, 'Of Elves and Dwarves', 96–7 *et passim*; cf. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, II 444–9.

[18] Ed. Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, I 41–3, 45; Stephen A. Mitchell, 'Skírnir's Other Journey: The Riddle of Gleipnir', in *Gudar på jorden: Festskrift till Lars Lönnroth*, ed. Stina Hansson and Mats Malm (Stockholm: Östling, 2000), pp. 67–75, at 67–9.

Despite long-standing scepticism, however, the *ljósálfar* have maintained a reputation as a race of ethereal, celestial '(light-)elves'.[19] But, as Holtsmark showed in 1964, Snorri's description of *Víðbláinn* was almost certainly influenced by (and possibly based on) the account of the angels in the *Elucidarius*, an early-twelfth-century digest of Christian theology translated into Icelandic by about 1200, certainly used elsewhere in *Snorra Edda*.[20] The oldest manuscript of the *Elucidarius*, AM 674a 4to, includes the dialogue

> D(iscipulus). Huar byggver G(oþ). Magister. Hvorvetna es velde hans en þo es oþle hans iscilningar himne. D(iscipulus). Huat es scilningar himinn Magister Þrir ero himnar. Einn licamlegr sa es ver megom sia. Annarr andlegr. þar es andlegar scepnor bvggua þat ero englar. Enn þriþe es scilningar himinn þar es heilog þrenning bvggver. oc helger englar mego þar sia G(oþ).[21]
>
> Pupil: Where does God live? Master: Wherever his power extends; however, his native region is in the sky of intellect. Pupil: What is the sky of intellect? Master: There are three skies. One is bodily, that which we can see. The second is spiritual (*andlegr*), where the spiritual beings live who are angels. But the third is the sky of intellect, where the Holy Trinity lives; and there can holy angels see God.

From this, Snorri derived his three *himnar*. That the *Elucidarius* was also an inspiration for his *ljósálfar*, who 'eru fegri en sól' ('are more beautiful than the sun'), is suggested by its mention of 'englar es .vii. hlutu*m* ero fegre an sol' ('angels, which are seven times more beautiful than the sun'; cf. 'angeli, qui solem septuplo sua vincunt pulchritudine' in the original).[22] Admittedly, the *Elucidarius* situates its *englar* in the second tier of heaven, *andlegr*, rather than the third, which is where the *ljósálfar* appear in *Snorra Edda*. Nor is the phrase *fegri en sól* particularly distinctive.[23] Even so, a verbal connection between the *Elucidarius* and Snorri's description of the *ljósálfar* seems probable, *ljósálfar* being at one level at least a paganisation of Christian angels. Snorri presumably renamed the *dvergar*, therefore, to suggest that they were to *ljósálfar* as fallen angels were to heavenly ones – a characteristic accommodation of traditional cosmology to Christian.

19 De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 1 259 shows scepticism; less circumspect are R. A. Peters, 'OE *ælf, -ælf, ælfen, -ælfen*', *Philological Quarterly*, 42 (1963), 250–7, at 253; Motz, 'Of Elves and Dwarves', 96, 98–100, *et passim*; Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. Angela Hall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993) (first publ. *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie*, Kröners Taschenausgabe, 368 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1984)), s.v. *light elves*.

20 For dating see Evelyn Scherabon Firchow and Kaaren Grimstad (ed.), *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 36 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1989), xvii, xxvi; on Snorri's use Holtsmark, *Studier*, 35–8; cf. Simek, *Dictionary*, s.vv. *andlangr*, *víðbláinn*; Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language*, The Viking Collection, 4 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), 55–8.

21 Ed. Firchow and Grimstad, *Elucidarius*, 12–14, with slight normalisation. Cf. the Latin original, ed. Yves Lefèvre, *L'Elucidarium et les lucidaires*, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 180 (Paris: Boccard, 1954), 362: 'D. – Ubi habitat Deus? M. – Quamvis ubique potentialiter, tamen in intellectuali caelo substantialiter. D. – Quid est hoc? M. – Tres caeli dicuntur: unum corporale, quod a nobis videtur; aliud spirituale, quod spirituales substantiae, scilicet angeli, inhabitare creduntur; tertium intellectuale, in quo Trinitas sancta a beatis facie ad faciem contemplatur.'

22 Ed. Firchow and Grimstad, *Elucidarius*, 8; Lefèvre, *L'Elucidarium*, 361.

23 Cf. *Vǫluspá* stanza 64, ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 15.

That Snorri chose *álfr* as a counterpart for the Christian *engill* ('angel') is not, of course, without interest. If nothing else it suggests that *álfr* had positive connotations. However, Snorri had few options at this point.[24] Of the other native Norse words denoting male supernatural beings which had positive connotations, Snorri had already employed *áss* and *vanr*, while the plurals *regin* and *tívar* were both archaic and entrenched as synonyms for the *æsir*. Snorri's only likely alternatives were the rather colourless *vættr* ('(supernatural) being') and *andi* ('spirit'). The fact that he chose *álfr* over these can be adequately explained from other evidence: *Skáldskarpamál* shows that Snorri knew the kenning *álfrǫðull* (denoting the sun and discussed below), which could be taken to associate *álfar* with light, and he may have felt a need to fit *álfar* into his mythography which did not extend to the more generic terms *vættr* and *andi*.[25]

Álfr does occur in chapters 48–9 of *Ynglinga saga*, in the epithet of Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr ('the *álfr* of Geirstaðir'), for whose son, Snorri claims in the saga's preface, Þjóðólfr ór Hvini composed *Ynglingatal*, the poem on which the saga is based.[26] But *Ynglingatal* itself does not contain the epithet. Although no explicit explanation for it is ever given, it has excited speculation linking *álfar* with the dead, because in other accounts, which Heinrichs has argued to have originated in a twelfth-century *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaðaálfs*, people sacrifice to Óláfr after his death.[27] But, besides Heinrichs's point that the ideology of the *þáttr* is very much of the later twelfth century, its account of Óláfr's cult perhaps reflecting saints' cults, this is not clearly the reason for Óláfr's name.[28] Various other factors might be relevant: his mother comes from Álfheimar; as I discuss below, *álfr* is common in poetic epithets for men and *Geirstaðaálfr* could originate as one of these; it may be also be an epithet of Freyr, from whom Óláfr is descended in the sagas; and in the *þáttr*, Óláfr is especially

24 For partial surveys of the lexicon of divine beings, see Maurice Cahen, *Le mot 'dieu' en vieux-scandinave*, Collection linguistique publiée par la Société de Linguistique de Paris, 10 (Paris: Champion, 1921), 9–28; Hans Kuhn, 'Philologisches zur altgermanischen Religionsgeschichte', in *Kleine Schriften: Aufsätze und Rezensionen aus den Gebieten der germanischen und nordischen Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte*, 4 vols (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969–78), IV pp. 223–321.

25 Ed. Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, I 85, 133.

26 Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla*, Íslenzk fornrit, 26–8, 3 vols (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritfélag, 1941–51), I 4, 79–82.

27 Anne Heinrichs, 'The Search for Identity: A Problem after the Conversion', *Alvíssmál*, 3 (1993), 43–62, at 57. Examples linking *álfar* and the dead include Hilda Roderick Ellis, *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature* (New York: Greenwood, 1968) (first publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), 111–16; N. K. Chadwick, 'Norse Ghosts (a Study in the *Draugr* and the *Haugbúi*)', *Folk-Lore*, 57 (1946), 50–65, 106–27, at 58–9; Nora Kershaw Chadwick, 'Literary Tradition in the Old Norse and Celtic World', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 14 (1953–7), 164–99, at 182–4; De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, I 258–60; Turville-Petre, *Myth*, 231; Jens Peter Schjødt, 'Relationen mellem aser og vaner og dens ideologiske implikationer', in *Nordisk hedendom: Et symposium*, ed. G. Steinsland *et al.* ([Odense]: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1991), pp. 303–19, at 305–7.

28 Heinrichs, 'Search for Identity', 44–50; cf. Walter Baetke, *Yngvi und die Ynglinger: Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung über das nordische 'Sakralkönigtum'*, Sitzungsberichte der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse, 109/3 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), 40–7; Olof Sundqvist, *Freyr's Offspring: Rulers and Religion in Ancient Svea Society*, Acta Universitatis Upsalensis: Historia religionum, 21 (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Uppsalensis, 2002), 291.

handsome, a characteristic shared by *álfar* in the *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum*, from around 1300.[29] Óláfr's epithet is, therefore, too ambiguous as evidence for the early meanings of *álfr*.

Finally, it is worth discussing a major division in the mythography of *Gylfaginning* which ostensibly excludes *álfar*: Snorri divides the gods into two groups, the *æsir* and the *vanir*. This division has been received as axiomatic in most modern mythography, but it is curiously ill-paralleled. Moreover, Snorri's usage of *álfr* in *Skáldskaparmál* is much closer to that of his poetic sources than to *Gylfaginning*. For example, Snorri states that 'Mann er ok rétt at kenna til allra Ása heita. Kent er ok við jǫtna heiti, ok er þat flest háð eða lastmæli. Vel þykkir kent til álfa' ('It is also proper to call a person by the names of all the *æsir*. They are also known by the names of *jǫtnar*, and that is mostly as satire or criticism. It is thought good to name after (the) *álfar*').[30] This matches attested skaldic usage (discussed in the next section), but does not fit well with *Gylfaginning*'s *ljósálfar* and *døkkálfar*. This is not the place to reassess our evidence for the *vanir* and the assumptions which past scholarship has made about it. However, it is worth emphasising that *Gylfaginning* and *Ynglinga saga* aside, *vanr* is a rare word in Norse and unattested elsewhere in the Germanic languages, whereas *álfr* is well attested, widespread and with a range of clear Indo-European cognates.[31] Whereas in *Gylfaginning* the gods are divided into the *æsir* and *vanir*, our other evidence, including *Skáldskaparmál*, repeatedly prefers to speak of *æsir* and *álfar*. The possibility arises that *vanr* and *álfr* originally denoted essentially the same mythological construct, their dissimilation in *Gylfaginning* perhaps reflecting Snorri's systematising mythography. I discuss this prospect further below. For now, however, we may turn to our poetic evidence.

[29] Carl af Petersens and Emil Olson (ed.), *Sǫgur Danakonunga: 1. Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum; 2. Knytlinga saga*, Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur, 46 (Copenhagen: [Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur], 1919–26), 25.

[30] Ed. Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, I 40, cf. 5.

[31] Kuhn 'Religionsgechichte', IV 272–6; on *álfr*'s cognates see pp. 54–5 below. Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 177–8, suggested that the prototheme of Old English *wanseoce*, occurring among interlinear glosses on *comitiales* ('epileptics') in Aldhelm's *Prosa de virginitate* (quoted below, pp. 149–50), is cognate with *vanr*. However, *vanr* is an *i*-stem and as such should appear in Old English as ***wene* – unless we assume declension-change, adding another hypothesis to the argument. (Alternatively, if *wan-* is considered a borrowing of *vanr*, it is not evidence for a Common Germanic etymon.) I suspect that this is simply the common if semantically problematic Old English adjective *wann* (on whose semantics see Andrew Breeze, 'Old English *Wann*, "Dark; Pallid": Welsh *Gwann* "Weak; Sad, Gloomy"', *ANQ*, 10 (1997), 10–13; putatively 'dark'), *wann* denoting a symptom of illness in Old English (as in *Gif him biþ ælfsogoða* discussed below, p. 105–6) and in Old Frisian *wanfelle*, *wanfellic* ('with bruised skin, black and blue'; see Rolf H. Bremmer, 'The Old Frisian Component in Holthausen's *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 17 (1988), 5–13, at 11).

ÁLFR IN SKALDIC VERSE

Álfr appears in skaldic verse almost invariably in kennings – essentially poetic metaphors – for human warriors.[32] It is fairly common in this role, and is attested already in the work of the earliest skald, Bragi inn gamli Boddason. At some point in the ninth century, Bragi called the legendary king Jǫrmunrekr *sóknar alfr* ('*álfr* of attack') in stanza 4 of his *Ragnarsdrápa*, and the hero Hǫgni *raðaralfr* ('*álfr* of the ship') in stanza 11.[33] Around the end of the century, Þjóðólfr ór Hvini called Hálfdan hvítbeinn Óláfsson *brynjalfr* ('armour-*álfr*') in stanza 30 of his *Ynglingatal*, and numerous other examples followed.[34] Perhaps because *álfr* never actually denotes an *álfr* in skaldic verse, this corpus has been little used as evidence for *álfr*'s early meanings. But, following my arguments in the previous chapter that the meanings of words can tell us about the concepts which they denoted, the kennings offer important insights.

The usage of *álfr* in kennings suggests that it only denoted males. This may not, admittedly, have applied to the plural: *áss* denoted a male god, but *æsir* could include the female *ásynjur* (albeit infrequently); likewise, *álfar* might have denoted both males and females. By the high Middle Ages, Icelandic could denote female *álfar* with the compound *álfkona* ('*álfr*-woman'), but we have no early evidence to clarify the situation.[35] Wolff extracted a second point from the kennings, however: whereas Snorri proscribes the mention of *jǫtnar* in kennings for people, he accepts *álfar*, who, Wolff inferred, 'dem Menschen freundlich sind' ('are friendly towards humans').[36] This observation has not been developed, but an examination of words for supernatural beings in kennings both confirms and elaborates it.

Strikingly, *álfr* shares its distribution in skaldic verse distinctively, among words denoting kinds of supernatural beings, with kennings containing *áss*.[37]

[32] Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum*, s.v. *alfr*; cf. Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*, Rheinische Beiträge und Hülfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde, 1 (Bonn: Schroeder, 1921), 264.

[33] Ed. Finnur Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 4 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912–15), BI 1–4; for dating see E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), xxi–xxiii; Margaret Clunies Ross's biography of Bragi at the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* website, <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/>, accessed 17 May 2006.

[34] Ed. Finnur Jónsson, *Norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, BI 12. My dating is conventional; Claus Krag, *Ynglingatal og Ynglingesaga: En studie i historiske kilder*, Studia humaniora (Rådet for humanistisk forskning), 2 (Oslo: Rådet for humanistisk forskning, NAVF, 1991), 13–80, surveyed part of the debate about the poem's date and himself supported a late one, but his arguments serve best to show the value of the traditional dating: cf. Sundqvist, *Freyr's Offspring*, 43–52.

[35] *DONP*, s.v. *alfkona*; Finnur Jónsson, *Ordbog*, s.v. *álfkona*.

[36] Ludwig Wolff, 'Eddisch-skaldische Blütenlese', in *Edda, Skalden, Saga: Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Felix Genzmer*, ed. Hermann Schneider (Heidelberg: Winter, 1952), pp. 92–107, at 101.

[37] Kennings are being catalogued in the *Lexicon of Kennings and Similar Poetic Circumlocutions*, at <http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/>, accessed 17 May 2006, which so far reproduces and supplements Meissner, *Kenningar*. I suggest below that *álfr* could have been a *heiti* for Freyr, so *álfr*-kennings might actually allude to him; they are used in much the same way as kennings mentioning Freyr. But there is little reason to assume this generally.

Áss occurs often as a simplex, and in kennings for poetry and gods. But its most common use in kennings is, like *álfr*, as the headword in kennings denoting human warriors, such as *ǫ́ss Fróða hríðar* ('*áss* of Fróði's storm (=battle)') in stanza 32 of *Vellekla*, composed by the pagan Icelander Einarr skálaglamm in the late tenth century.[38] By contrast, few other words denoting types of supernatural beings occur in kennings for humans. *Goð* and *regin* occur, but only rarely, and are partially if not wholly synonymous with *áss*.[39] Words for *dísir* are common as modifiers in kennings for warriors (for example *valmeyjar álfr*, '*álfr* of the slaughter-maid'), but not as headwords.[40] In kennings for women, *ásynja* occurs, which we may take as an extension of the data for *áss*; and possibly *band*, another synonym for *áss* (occurring only in the plural form *bǫnd*). *Dís* and *norn* occur fairly often, and again seem on external evidence to have been at least partially synonymous.[41] Taking *draugr* in kennings for humans to be the homonym denoting living warriors rather than dead ones, none of the numerous other Norse words for types of supernatural beings, such as *dvergr*, *jǫtunn*, *mara* or *þurs*, appears in kennings for humans.[42] Nor, it should be noted, does *vanr*, which occurs only a few times in skaldic verse.

This distribution suggests that to the formative skaldic poets, *álfr* denoted something mythologically close enough to human males to be used as the generic element in kennings for them, and something close enough to *áss* to share this usage with it distinctively among words for supernatural beings. More generally, words for supernatural beings used in kennings for humans can thus be reckoned in three groups: *áss*, *ásynja* and their (partial) synonyms *goð* and *regin*; *álfr*; and *dís* and *norn*. Assuming that this system exhibited symmetry of gender, this analysis suggests that *dísir* and *nornir* were to the *álfar* as the *ásynjur* were to the *æsir* – their female counterparts. Finally, words denoting monstrous beings were evidently excluded from this system – except, if we accept Snorri's claim in *Skáldskaparmál*, in mockery – suggesting that *álfar* joined *æsir* and humans in a systematic opposition to monstrous beings.

The distribution of words for supernatural beings in kennings for men is paralleled by other sorts of early Old Norse lexical evidence. Compounds ending in Old Norse *-kunnr* and *-kunnigr* (variant forms of the same word, cognate with English *kin*, not to be confused with the homophonous *kunnigr* 'knowledgeable', cognate with *cunning*) and their Germanic cognates were used either to denote descent from or origin in the determiner of the compound (for example Old Norse *reginkunnr*, Old English *godcund*, 'originating with god(s)'), or similarity in nature to it (for example Old High German *manchunt*

38 Finnur Jónsson, *Norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, B1 123; Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum*, s.v. *ǫ́ss*; cf. Meissner, *Kenningar*, 264.

39 Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum*, s.vv.; cf. Meissner, *Kenningar*, 264.

40 Meissner, *Kenningar*, 273–4.

41 Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum*, s.vv.; cf. Meissner, *Kenningar*, 408–9, 411–12; above, pp. 22–3.

42 On *draugr* see John Lindow, *Comitatus, Individual and Honor: Studies in North Germanic Institutional Vocabulary*, University of California Publications in Linguistics, 83 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 84–96.

'male'). The determiner usually denoted a being.[43] Of determiners denoting supernatural beings, only *goð-* and its cognates are well attested; Old English also innovated *engelcund* and *deofolcund*. But although the dataset is small, Old Norse exhibits compounds with the determiners *ás-*, *álf-*, *regin-* and *goð-* – precisely the range of words for supernatural beings used in kennings for men.[44]

Further parallels can be found in the Old Norse personal-name system, which I outline below in my discussion of Anglo-Saxon names. But the theophoric associations of *álfr* are particularly emphasised by two Norse dithematic names. As Müller pointed out, the Old Norse deuterotheme *-arinn*, probably cognate with Old Icelandic *arinn* ('hearth') and Old High German *arin* ('altar'), appears only in the names *Þórarinn* and *Álfarinn*.[45] The fact that *álfr* occurs here uniquely beside the deity-name *Þórr* suggests again that *álfr* had theophoric connotations. Likewise, in Denmark, probably in the eleventh century, the sons of one Eykil were named Alfkil and Þorkil.[46] Hald found that 'Áskell og Þórkell er de mest udbredte navne på ketill' ('*Áskell* and *Þórkell* are the most widespread names in *-ketill*') in early-medieval Denmark, reflecting a general pattern of alternation between *Ás-* and *Þór* in personal names.[47] Once more, we find *álfr* distinctively associated with a theophoric name.

Álfr appears in one other kenning, less useful here: *álfrǫðull* (denoting the sun), which occurs occasionally in both skaldic and Eddaic verse.[48] Unfortunately, its precise significance is unclear: since in verse *rǫðull* as a simplex also denotes the sun, the kenning *álfrǫðull* was no doubt used for metrical convenience as a formulaic variant. But the association of *álfr* with a word denoting the sun must have been semantically congruent, presumably adding connotations which could be employed to literary effect. However, we must proceed from our knowledge of *álfar* to the explication of the kenning, rather than the other way, so *álfrǫðull* may be excluded from consideration for now (see further the next section).

Likewise stanza 5 of Sigvatr Þorðarson's skaldic *Austrfararvísur*, recounting

43 Walter Hofstetter, 'The Old English Adjectival Suffix *-cund*', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Korhammer (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 325–47, at 340–2.

44 See Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum*, s.vv. *áskunnigr*, *áskunnr*, *alfkunnigr*, *alfkunnr*, *godkynningr*, *reginkunnigr*, *reginkunnr*; cf. Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, 4 vols (Oslo: Den Norske Forlagsforening; Universitetsforlaget, 1886–1972), IV s.v. *alfkyndr*; Hofstetter, '*-cund*'. *Regin-* compounds occur in two verses and two runic inscriptions; *áskunnigr* and *álfkunnigr* only in *Fáfnismál* stanza 13 (ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 182), and *álfkunnr* only in Snorri's discussion of it (ed. Faulkes, *Gylfaginning*, 18); *guðkunnigr* occurs in verse only by emendation (from *-konungr* in *Ynglingatal* st. 27). There is also an exception, *trollkunnr*, in *Ynglingatal* stanza 3, which, if the first element does not simply denote 'magic', might be understood as a parallel to Snorri's claim of kennings using the names of *jǫtnar* in mockery.

45 G. Müller, *Studien zu den theriophoren Personennamen der Germanen*, Niederdeutsche Studien, 17 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1970), 40–1, 131–2.

46 Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke (ed.), *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1941–2), I cols 432–3 [no. 376]; the second element, a contracted form of *ketill* 'cauldron, pot', may, like *-arinn*, have ritual associations; Kristian Hald, *Personnavne i Danmark*, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Dansk Historisk Fællesforening, 1971–4), I 15.

47 Hald, *Personnavne*, I 48–50, at 49.

48 Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum*, s.v. *alfrǫðull*.

the Christian Sigvatr's travels in the pagan lands east of Norway around 1020, describes a heathen *ekkja* ('widow') refusing Sigvatr board for the night for fear of 'Óðins . . . reiði' ('Óðinn's wrath'), because an *alfa blót* ('*álfar*'s sacrifice') is taking place in the house.[49] This text implies that *álfar* might be worshipped in late Swedish paganism, and it is of interest, in view of the association of *álfar* with Freyr elsewhere, that there is strong evidence for the prominence of Freyr in Swedish paganism.[50] But it gives no other concrete information. Sigvatr's association of the *álfa blót* with Óðinn could be mere stereotyping of pagan practice. It has been supposed that the *ekkja* must have been running the *álfablót*, but all Sigvatr really tells us is that she answered the door.[51] However, the stanza does recall our scattered evidence for sacrifices to *dísir* and may reflect the pairing of *álfr* and *dís* suggested by their respective use in kennings for men and women. Useful observations along these lines have been made before, but again lexical evidence has been missed, this time in the compound *álfablót*.[52] The only words for types of supernatural being in Old Norse to be compounded with *-blót* are *álfa-* here; *dísa-* in the *dísablót* ('*dísir*'s sacrifice') mentioned, for example, in *Ynglinga saga* chapter 29 and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* chapter 44; the more general *(skurð)goða-* ('of (carved-)gods-'); and the borrowed *djǫfla-* ('of devils-').[53] Once more, the evidence is slight, and somewhat ambiguous, but a connection between *álfar* and *dísir* here does seem likely.

Skaldic verse suggests the basic associations of *álfr* and *álfar* in pre-conversion Scandinavian traditions: with gods and, metaphorically, with men. *Álfar*, along with these groups, were systematically contrasted with monsters. Taking only the evidence for words denoting males, my inferences so far can be presented as a componential analysis in terms of the two features ±MONSTROUS and ±SUPERNATURAL:

	karlmaðr	*áss*	*álfr*	*jǫtunn*
SUPERNATURAL	–	+	+	+
MONSTROUS	–	–	–	+

Figure 1. Componential analysis of Old Norse words for beings

Needless to say, this analysis is crude; introducing distinctions of gender to it, for example, would produce the familiar problems of binary componential

[49] Ed. Finnur Jónsson, *Norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, BI 221.

[50] De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II 194–203; Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 168–70.

[51] For example, Jan De Vries, 'Über Sigvats Álfablótstrophen', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica*, 7 (1932–3), 169–80, at 170–1; Jochens, *Images of Women*, 46, 48.

[52] See Ström, *Diser*, esp. 12–31; Näsström, *Freyja*, 127–9; Sundqvist, *Freyr's Offspring*, 225–32, and 99–105, 285–9, for a broader contextualisation.

[53] Respectively ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I 58, and Sigurður Nordal, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit, 2 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritfélag, 1933), 107. Cf. Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum*, s.v. *blót*; *DONP*, s.v.

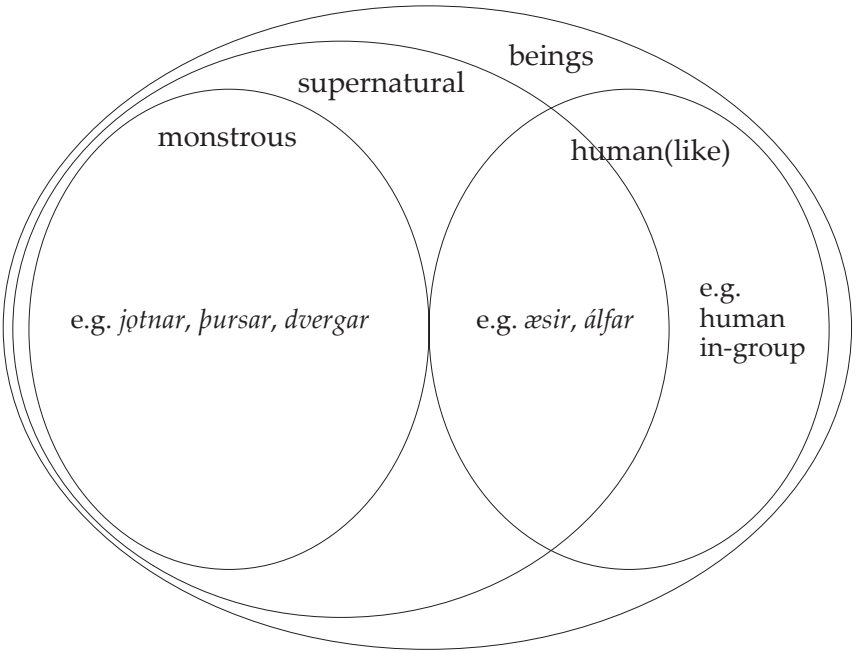

Figure 2. Semantic field diagram of Old Norse words for beings

analyses.[54] The analysis can also be expressed as a semantic field diagram (Figure 2).

While it would be possible to speak hereafter of *álfar* as 'non-monstrous supernatural beings', I suggest instead 'otherworldly beings' as an appropriate alternative term; its mixed connotations of wonder and fear will emerge below to be fitting to members of this category.

This intepretation differs from a predominantly German historiographical tradition linking *álfar* (somewhat like Snorri) with *dvergar*, in aligning *álfar* rather with *æsir* and *dísir*, and *dvergar* with the monstrous *jǫtnar*.[55] Although the alternative alignment would help to explain medieval German folklore, in which not only *zwerger* but beings lexically related to elves are smiths and

[54] On which see Lyons, *Semantics*, esp. I 322–5.

[55] Associating *dvergar* with *álfar*, for example, Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, II 443–72; De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, I 252–64; Motz, 'Of Elves and Dwarves'; Claude Lecouteux, *Les nains et elfes au Moyen Age*, 2nd edn (Paris: Imago, 1997); and on Old English Richard Jente, *Die mythologischen Ausdrücke im altenglischen Wortschatz: Eine kulturgeschichtlich-etymologische Untersuchung*, Anglistische Forschungen, 56 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1921), 167–91; Ernst Alfred Philippson, *Germanisches Heidentum bei den Angelsachsen*, Kölner anglistische Arbeiten, 4 (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1929), 69–78. Associating *dvergar* with *jǫtnar*, for example Helmut De Boor, 'Der Zwerg in Skandinavien', in *Fest Schrift: Eugen Mogk zum 70. Geburtstag 19. Juli 1924* (Halle an der Saale: Niemeyer, 1924), pp. 536–57, 550–7; Anne Holtsmark, *Norrøn mytologi: Tro og myter i vikingtiden* (Oslo: Norske Samlaget, 1970), 75–80; Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I 50–1, 54–6; Paul Acker, 'Dwarf-Lore in *Alvíssmál*', in *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 215–27.

live under the ground, mine is the one suggested by the kennings, the earliest Norse evidence.[56] The tendency to conflate *elben* with *zwerger* in German sources can be explained fairly straightforwardly by demonisation of *elben*, building on certain of their traditional associations. A further reason for associating *dvergar* and *álfar* has been that *dvergar* are prominently associated with smithing, and that this characteristic is also shared by the eponymous protagonist of the Eddaic *Vǫlundarkviða*, discussed further below, who is probably an *álfr* (and perhaps also that the Middle English poet Laȝamon attributed King Arthur's mailcoat to an 'aluisc smið' in a passage which is, however, laden with interpretative difficulties).[57] However, the *æsir* too are intimately associated with smithing, in stanzas 7 and 61 of *Vǫluspá*, as are otherworldly beings elsewhere in medieval Europe, such as the Irish *síde* and French *fées*, and none of these are closely associated with *dvergar* or like beings.[58] It might also be added, since this is not the last time smiths will appear in this book, that, as Wicker has pointed out, the fact that supernaturally empowered figures are smiths does not mean that smiths are necessarily supernaturally empowered.[59] Evidence that smithing was considered magical, or was otherwise associated with supernatural powers, exists for various cultures around the world – a point emphasised most famously by Eliade, and frequently assumed for early-medieval northern Europe.[60] But although the prestige of metalworking skills and their ideological importance in this region is clear, there is precious little evidence that smithing was seen as inherently supernatural.[61]

56 On the German material see Lotte Motz, *The Wise One of the Mountain: Form, Function and Significance of the Subterranean Smith. A Study in Folklore*, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 379 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1983), esp. pp. 23–66; cf. for related themes Feilberg, *Bjærgtagen*.

57 On *dvergar* see De Boor, 'Der Zwerg'; Acker, 'Dwarf-Lore'; on Vǫlundr the next section; on the passage in Laȝamon's *Brut* (ed. G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie, *Laȝamon: Brut*, Early English Text Society, 250, 277, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1963–78), II 550–1) Françoise H. M. Le Saux, *Laȝamon's 'Brut': The Poem and its Sources*, Arthurian Studies, 19 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), 196–200; Cyril Edwards, 'Laȝamon's Elves', in *Laȝamon: Contexts, Language, and Interpretation*, ed. Rosamund Allen, Lucy Perry and Jane Roberts, King's College London Medieval Studies, 19 (London: King's College London Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 2002), pp. 79–96, at 85–7.

58 Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 2, 14; see also Boberg, *Motif-Index*; cf. McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 23. Tom Peete Cross, *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*, Indiana University Publications, Folklore Series, 7 (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1952), 254 [F.217.3]; Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, *Index des motifs narratifs dans les romans Arthuriens français en vers (XIIe-XIIIe siècles) / Motif-Index of French Arthurian Verse Romances (XIIth–XIIIth Cent.)*, Publications romanes et françaises, 202 (Geneva: Droz,1992), 64, 67 [F271.3, F343.3].

59 Cf. Nancy L. Wicker, 'The Organization of Crafts Production and the Social Status of the Migration Period Goldsmith', in *The Archaeology of Gudme and Lundeborg: Papers Presented at a Conference at Svendborg, October 1991*, ed. P. O. Nielsen, K. Randsborg and H. Thrane, Arkæologiske studier, 10 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1994), pp. 145–50, esp. 145–7.

60 Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, trans. Stephen Corrin (London: Rider, 1962) (first publ. *Forgerons et Achimistes* (Paris: Flammarion, [1956])).

61 See for example David A. Hinton, 'Anglo-Saxon Smiths and Myths', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 80 (1998), 3–21; Elizabeth Coatsworth and Michael Pinder, *The Art of the Anglo-Saxon Goldsmith: Fine Metalwork in Anglo-Saxon England, its Practice and Practitioners*, Anglo-Saxon Studies, 2 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002); John Hines, 'Myth and Reality: The Contribution of Archaeology', in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilisation, 14 ([Odense]: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), pp. 19–39.

Lines 47–55 of the eighth-century Irish *lorica* known as *Patrick's Hymn* do explicitly invoke protection 'fri brichtu ban ⁊ gobann ⁊ druad' ('against the incantations of women and smiths and druids'); but in our early-medieval sources, magic and weaving are much more strongly associated than magic and smithing, and no-one, as far as I am aware, has claimed that weaving was an inherently magical or supernatural process, or that weavers were necessarily supernaturally empowered by their craft.[62]

I maintain, then, my binary division between *æsir* and *álfar* on the one hand and *dvergar* and *jǫtnar* on the other. This is not to say that there was never any ambiguity about these categories: distinctions between *æsir* and *jǫtnar*, accurate as generalisation, are not always entirely neat, and the same may be true of *álfar* and *dvergar*.[63] But it is to say that at an ideological level, clear distinctions did exist, to which the vast majority of our early evidence neatly conforms. Basic though it is, the Norse model provides important information about the early meanings of *álfr*. Moreover, it hints at a major mythological pattern in early-medieval Scandinavian world-views, delineating a fundamental binary opposition between beings which are human or otherworldly on the one hand, and those which are monstrous on the other. These themes are elucidated by reference to the next body of evidence, Eddaic verse.

ÁLFR IN EDDAIC VERSE

Álfr is frequent in the Eddaic corpus, whose usage is largely consistent with the skaldic verse, but which presents mythological traditions more fully. Tempting though it is to try to order the Eddaic poems by date or place of origin, the uncertainties and complexities of transmission in the corpus make this too problematic to be attempted here.[64] Nor do I analyse all the occurrences of *álfr*. This is not because they are not of interest, but because my primary concern here is to develop a reliable and pertinent context for interpreting our Anglo-Saxon evidence. One poem, however, is particularly important to the present study because it not only contains *álfr* but seems also to have English connections: *Vǫlundarkviða*. Accordingly, I consider *Vǫlundarkviða* below, separately from the other texts.

62 Ed. Whitley Stokes and John Strachan, *Thesaurus palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose and Verse*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901–3), II 357. On spinning and weaving as means of shaping the future in early-medieval European culture see generally Michael J. Enright, *Lady with a Mead-Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), 109–21; Flint *The Rise of Magic*, 226–8; cf. Erik Moltke, *Runes and their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere*, trans. Peter Foote, rev. edn (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1985), 358–60.

63 For *æsir* and *jǫtnar* see Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, esp. I 56–79; cf. Lotte Motz, 'Gods and Demons of the Wilderness: A Study in Norse Tradition', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 99 (1984), 175–87.

64 See Bjarne Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 41 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1999).

Formulas and Freyr

As commentators have often noted, *álfr* mainly occurs in Eddaic poetry in the formulaic collocation *æsir ok álfar*, which we have met already in Old English form in the alliterative pairing of *ēse* and *ælfe* in *Wið fǣrstice*. The formula and its variants occur fourteen times, as in *Hávamál* stanzas 159–60, which are particularly noteworthy because *æsir* and *álfar* both seem to be denoted there by *tívar* ('gods'):

> Þat kann ec iþ fiórtánda, ef ec scal fyrða liði
> telia tíva fyrir:
> ása oc álfa ec kann allra scil,
> fár kann ósnotr svá.
> Þat kann ec iþ fimtánda, er gól Þióðrørir,
> dvergr, fyr Dellings durom:
> afl gól hann ásom, enn álfom frama,
> hyggio Hroptatý.[65]
>
> I know it, the fourteenth, if I must reckon up *tívar* in front of a company of people:
> I know how to distinguish all the *æsir* and *álfar*; few who are not wise can do so.
> I know it, the fifteenth, which Þjóðrørir the *dvergr* chanted in front of Dellingr's doors:
> he chanted strength for the *æsir*, but success for the *álfar*, intelligence for Hroptr-Týr [=Óðinn]

Áss always comes first in the pair except in *Skírnismál* stanzas 17–18. The collocation is doubtless sometimes merely formulaic, and besides showing that *æsir* were associated with *álfar* is not in itself very informative.[66] Rather it is contexts like the one just quoted that give us evidence that *álfr* here denoted something very like *áss*.

Uncertainty as to the precise significance of *álfr* in *æsir ok álfar* does not usually much trouble modern readers, and need not have troubled medieval ones, but it does present a serious inconvenience in *Lokasenna*. *Lokasenna*'s prose introduction gives a list of gods, explaining that at Ægir's feast, 'Mart var þar ása oc álfa' ('Many of the *æsir* and *álfar* were there'). Three times in the poem itself, Loki says *ása oc álfa, er hér inno ero* ('of the *æsir* and *álfar* who are here within').[67] However, despite the presence in *Lokasenna* of most of

[65] Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 43–4.

[66] The exhaustive classification of Eddaic formulae by Elena A. Gurevič, 'The Formulaic Pair in Eddic Poetry: An Experimental Analysis', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilisation, 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 32–55 (first publ. E. A. Gurevič, 'Parnaja formula v eddičeskoi poezii (opyt analiza)', in *Chudožestvennyj jazyk srednevekov'ja*, ed. V. A. Korpusin (Moscow: [n. publ.], 1982), pp. 61–82)) makes some ostensibly interesting observations, but her classifications are subjective and insufficiently sensitive to the meaning of each formula in the different contexts where they occur. Paul Acker, *Revising Oral Theory: Formulaic Composition in Old English and Old Icelandic Verse*, Garland Studies in Medieval Literature, 16 / Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 2104 (New York: Garland, 1998), 4, has since invoked a subtler classificatory system, but has not investigated its implications or underpinnings.

[67] St. 2, 13, 30, ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 97, 99, 102.

the Scandinavian pantheon, conventional accounts of Norse mythology list no *álfar* among them, following Snorri in labelling the named gods *æsir* or *vanir*. But *Lokasenna* is a tightly constructed poem and mythologically well informed.[68] It would be uncharacteristic, then, for it to repeat a formula which within its mythological frame of reference is partly otiose. Stanza 30 is rhetorically a fine insult:

> Þegi þú, Freyja! þic kann ec fullgerva,
> era þér vamma vant;
> ása oc álfa, er hér inni ero,
> hverr hefir þinn hór verið.[69]
>
> Shut up, Freyja! I know you completely,
> there is no lack of vices in you;
> of the *æsir* and the *álfar* who are in here,
> each has been your lover.

But it is rather deflated if we must envisage Freyja being accused of sex with some anonymous and shadowy collection of *álfar*.

The obvious explanation for the mysterious *álfar* of *Lokasenna* is to identify them with Snorri's *vanir*.[70] This prospect is particularly supported by *Grímnismál* stanza 5, where Óðinn declares that

> Álfheim Frey gáfo í árdaga
> tívar at tannfé.[71]
>
> The gods gave Freyr Álfheimr in ancient days as tooth-money [i.e. a gift at a child's first tooth].

Freyr is here portrayed, then, as the lord of the world of the *álfar*. In *Snorra Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*, Freyr is, of course, a prince of the *vanir* rather than the *álfar*. However, *vanr* occurs neither in *Lokasenna* nor *Grímnismál*, despite the extensive mythological lore in these poems. The simplest interpretation of these texts is to take Snorri's pairing of *æsir* and *vanir* to be a variant of a pairing of *æsir* and *álfar*, with *vanr* and *álfr*, in at least some times and places, denoting the same mythological construct. This reading would explain why Freyr would rule Álfheimr; why *áss* and *álfr* are used in the same way in kennings for men with *vanr* never being used, alongside the related question of why Snorri would suggest using names of *æsir* and *álfar*, but not *vanir*, in kennings for gods and men; and why Freyja stands accused of having sex with all the *æsir* and *álfar* at Ægir's feast. Indeed, if Freyja, Freyr and Njǫrðr are to be interpreted in *Lokasenna* as a kin-group of *álfar* as they are normally interpreted as a kin-group of *vanir*, then Loki's use of the *æsir ok álfar* formula in indicting Freyja would imply that she had not simply slept with all the *æsir*, but with her own family – neatly foreshadowing that very accusation, in stanza 32.

[68] John McKinnell, 'Motivation in *Lokasenna*', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 22 (1986–9), 234–62.
[69] Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 102.
[70] Cf. De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II 203; Holtsmark, *Norrøn mytologi*, 78; Näsström, *Freyja*, 61.
[71] Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 58.

Admittedly, some Eddaic poems do present *álfar* and *vanir* as different races. Examples include *Sigrdrífumál* stanza 18 and *Skírnismál* stanzas 17–18, but much the most prominent is *Alvíssmál*, which mentions *álfar* ten times, and *vanir* nine, as in stanza 12:

> Himinn heitir með mǫnnom, enn hlýrnir með goðom,
> kalla vindofni vanir,
> uppheim iǫtnar, álfar fagraræfr,
> dvergar driúpan sal.[72]
>
> It is called *himinn* ('sky') among people, but *hlýrnir* (lit. 'warm/mild one') among the *goð*;
> the *vanir* call it *vindofni* ('wind-weaver'),
> the *jǫtnar uppheim* ('world above'), the *álfar fagraræfr* ('beautiful roof'),
> the *dvergar drjúpan sal* ('dripping hall').

The distinction implied in these poems between *álfar* and *vanir* I take as a variant tradition, probably exhibiting a tendency to reanalyse synonyms as words denoting different things, perhaps partly through late- or post-pagan syncretic processes which brought together variant mythologies and terminologies without integrating them fully. *Alvíssmál* in particular is essentially a catalogue of poetic diction structured as a wisdom-contest, in which poetic names for different parts of the cosmos are attributed to *menn*, *goð*, *vanir*, *jǫtnar*, *álfar* and *dvergar*, generally in that order. The position of *álfar* notwithstanding, this sequence moves broadly from the centre to the periphery of the Scandinavian world-view, which might be taken as evidence for an association of *álfar* with *jǫtnar* and *dvergar*. Moreover, on ten of their appearances, *álfar* are juxtaposed with *jǫtnar*, which finds a parallel in *Beowulf*'s half-line 'eotenas ond ylfe', which pairs the words' Old English cognates and could be taken as evidence for traditionality.[73] I think that these similarities, however, are chimeric. *Alvíssmál*'s subject matter is primarily poetic diction, not mythography: the exigencies of metre as the poem gathers alliterating diction from limited pools lead to variations in the order or vocabulary in most stanzas, including undoubted duplications (such that *æsir* and *upregin* appear in st. 10, *menn* and *halir* in 28, and *jǫtnar* and *Suttungs synir* in 34), while its portrayals both of Þórr and of the *dvergr* Alvíss are inconsistent with other sources.[74] Although the contrast in the diction preferred by *álfar* and *dvergar* in the stanza quoted hints appealingly at ethnic characterisations, the words associated with a given group rarely suggest any mythographic programme. The pairing of *álfar* and *jǫtnar* – in addition to the convenience of the words' alliteration in Eddaic metres – could be based as much on contrast as on similarity.

Alvíssmál brings us to the association of *álfar* and *dvergar* discussed above; again, I find little support for the reading in Eddaic verse. I have quoted stanza

[72] Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 72–3, 125–6, 193.
[73] See pp. 69–70.
[74] Acker, 'Dwarf-Lore'.

160 of *Hávamál*, in which the *dvergr* Þjóðrørir 'afl gól . . . ásom, enn álfom frama' ('sang strength for the *æsir*, and for the *álfar* success'), but whatever is afoot here, it associates *dvergar* with *álfar* no more than with *æsir*.[75] More striking to my mind is stanza 143 of *Hávamál*, which, describing the carvers of runes, recalls the binary division between *æsir* and *álfar* on the one hand and *jǫtnar* and *dvergar* on the other:

> Óðinn með ásom, enn fyr álfom Dáinn,
> Dvalinn dvergom fyrir,
> Ásviðr iǫtnom fyrir,
> ec reist siálfr sumar.[76]
>
> Óðinn among the *æsir*, and for the *álfar*, Dáinn,
> Dvalinn for the *dvergar*,
> Ásviðr for the *jǫtnar*,
> I myself carved some.

Dáinn is the name of a *dvergr* in *Vǫluspá* 11 and (possibly derivatively) *Hyndluljóð* stanza 7; meanwhile, the names *Vindálfr* and *Gandálfr* also appear together in *Vǫluspá*'s list of *dvergar*, in stanzas 12 and 16.[77] However, the recurrence of the transparently meaningful name *Dáinn* ('the dead one') is no cause for surprise – it is, after all, the name of a hart in *Grímnismál* stanza 33.[78] The existence of *dvergar* with names in *-álfr* in *Vǫluspá* has been taken as evidence that *dvergar* might be *álfar*. This is a problematic inference, however. The historical personages called *Gandálfr* apart, it assumes that the element had a literal meaning when name-elements' meanings are often metaphorical (cf. the *dvergr*-names *Aurvargr* 'gravel-wolf', *Miðviðr* 'middle board').[79] If names in *-álfr* mean that their bearers are *álfar*, then we might conversely expect to find more *dvergar* with names in *-dvergr* and *jǫtnar* with names in *-jǫtunn* (there are none).

Having consolidated the alignment of *álfar* and *æsir* attested in the skaldic verse, one wonders further if *álfr* might have been used as a cognomen of Freyr, since this could explain the kenning *álfrǫðull*: if we may adduce Snorri's statement in *Gylfaginning* that Freyr 'ræðr fyrir regni ok skini sólar' ('rules over the rain and the shining of the sun'), then perhaps *álfr* in *álfrǫðull* denotes Freyr himself.[80] Snorri's claim gains some slight support from the name of Skírnir, whom Freyr sends to woo Gerðr in *Skírnismál*: Skírnir's name is transparently derived from *skírr* ('clear, bright'), and links Freyr indirectly with this characteristic. Reading *álfr* in *álfrǫðull* as a *heiti* for Freyr brings an arguably appropriate mythological connotation to the kenning, suggesting 'the *rǫðull* (denoting the sun) of the *Álfr* (=Freyr)', and such developments

75 Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 41.
76 Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 41.
77 Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 3, 4, 289.
78 Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 64.
79 See E. H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska dopnamn ock fingerade namn från medeltiden* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1905–15), col. 298 [s.v. *Gandálfr*]; Simek, *Dictionary*, s.vv. *Aurvargr*, *Miðviðr*.
80 Ed. Faulkes, *Gylfaginning*, 24.

of names for supernatural beings into gods' names are well attested.[81] The names *Álfarinn* and *Þórarinn* would correspond the better if *álf-* here is taken to denote an individual god. But little can be made of these hints.

Vǫlundarkviða

Vǫlundarkviða demands special attention because it is the only Old Norse poem where a character is clearly identified lexically as one of the *álfar*: Vǫlundr is described as 'álfa lióði' (as I discuss below, probably 'member of the *álfar*' but perhaps 'ruler of the *álfar*', st. 10) and 'vísi álfa' (probably 'wise one of the *álfar*' but possibly 'warrior of the *álfar*', st. 13, 32).[82] This identification presents the welcome prospect of associating *álfr* with narrative motifs as well as lexical contexts. Moreover, McKinnell has consolidated the long-standing idea that *Vǫlundarkviða* contains a number of Old English loan-words, and perhaps influence from Old English poetic metre.[83] This fits with the fact that Vǫlundr is otherwise rather poorly attested in Scandinavia, whereas there is a plethora of medieval references to Vǫlundr's counterparts in the West Germanic-speaking regions, including several from Anglo-Saxon England showing that his story there was similar to *Vǫlundarkviða*'s.[84] Accordingly, the other main Scandinavian account of Vǫlundr, *Velents þáttr* in *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, is based mainly on German sources.[85] Precisely what *Vǫlundarkviða*'s English connections were is harder to guess, not least because there are various cultural and perhaps linguistic layers to the text; but connections of some sort are not in doubt, so the poem may offer evidence which is especially relevant to Anglo-Saxon culture.[86] Here I summarise the text, outline and develop the evidence for its relevance to the present study, and proceed to a reading of the poem which I will pick up on in my arguments below.

81 Cf. **tīwaz* 'god' > Old Norse *Týr* (singular) 'the god Týr' but *tívar* (plural) 'gods'; Wilfried Stroh, 'Vom Faunus zum Faun: Theologische Beiträge von Horaz und Ovid', in *Ovid: Werk und Wirkung, Festgabe für Michael von Albrecht*, ed. Werner Schubert, Studien zur klassischen Philologie, 100 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1990), pp. 559–612 (also available at <http://www.klassphil.uni-muenchen.de/~stroh/FAUN.htm>, accessed 17 May 2006) for the argument, inverting previous assumptions, that Faunus may owe his name to the *fauni*. Likewise, Freyja, seen as the pre-eminent, divine *dís*, is usually assumed to be the *dís* of the *Dísarsalr* ('*dís*'s hall') mentioned in *Heiðreks saga* and *Ynglinga saga*, respectively ed. Jón Helgason, *Heiðreks saga: Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur, 48 (Copenhagen: Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur, 1924), 44; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, 1 58; see further Ström, *Diser*, 32–69; Näsström , *Freyja*, esp. 133–5.

82 The poem is ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 116–23.

83 John McKinnell, 'The Context of *Vǫlundarkviða*', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 23 (1990), 1–27, at 1–13.

84 See Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, 258–86; P. Maurus, *Die Wielandsage in der Litteratur*, Münchener Beiträge zur romanischen und englischen Philologie, 25 (Erlangen: Böhme, 1902), 7–57; Lang, 'Sigurd', 90–3; cf. Robert Nedoma, 'The Legend of Wayland in *Deor*', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 38 (1990), 129–45.

85 Chs 57–79, ed. Henrik Bertelsen, *Þiðriks saga af Bern*, Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur, 34, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Møller, 1905–11), 1 73–133. On sources see Andrew R. Davidson, 'The Legends of *Þiðreks saga af Bern*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1995).

86 For layering see Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, 287–90.

Vǫlundarkviða begins with the flight of three women identified in stanza 1 as *meyjar*, *drósir*, *alvitr* and *suðrœnar* ('young women, stately women, foreign beings, southerners') and in the prose introduction as *valkyrjur*, to a 'sævar strǫnd' ('lake/sea-shore') where they take for themselves the three brothers Egill, Slagfiðr and Vǫlundr. However, nine winters later, they leave the brothers; Slagfiðr and Egill go in search of their women, but Vǫlundr remains at home instead, forging *baugar* ('arm-rings') for his woman (stanzas 1–6). This part of the story is not present in *Þiðreks saga*, though it is an essential part of the *Vǫlundarkviða* that we have.[87] Discovering that Vǫlundr is living alone, Níðuðr, 'Niára dróttin' ('lord of the Njárar'), has him captured in his sleep (stanzas 7–12). Níðuðr takes Vǫlundr's sword and gives one of the rings which Vǫlundr made for his missing bride to his daughter Bǫðvildr, and, at his wife's instigation, he has Vǫlundr's hamstrings cut, imprisoning him on an island (stanzas 13–19). Vǫlundr takes his revenge on Níðuðr first by enticing his two sons to visit with promises of treasure, killing them, and making jewels of their eyes and teeth (stanzas 20–6); and then by enticing Bǫðvildr by promising to mend the ring which she was given, getting her drunk, and implicitly having sex with her (stanzas 27–9). The poem culminates in Vǫlundr taking to the air by some means which is not clearly described and telling Níðuðr what he has done (stanzas 30–9), focusing finally on the plight of Bǫðvildr (stanzas 40–1).

However, the two terms by which Vǫlundr is linked with *álfar* are obscure. Both are formulaic half-lines, appearing in the following stanzas:

> Sat á berfialli, bauga talði,
> álfa lióði, eins sacnaði;
> hugði hann, at hefði Hlǫðvés dóttir,
> alvitr unga, væri hon aptr komin.
>
> He sat on a bearskin, counted (arm-)rings,
> *lióði* of *álfar*, he noticed one was missing;
> he thought that Hlǫðvér's daughter,
> the young otherworldly being, had come back.
> (Stanza 10)

> Kallaði nú Níðuðr, Niára dróttinn:
> 'Hvar gaztu, Vǫlundr, vísi álfa,
> vára aura í Úlfdǫlom?'
>
> Níðuðr cried now, the lord of the Njárar,
> 'Where did you get, Vǫlundr, *vísi* of *álfar*,
> your wealth in Úlfdalar?'
> (Stanza 13)

> 'Seg þú mér þat, Vǫlundr, vísi álfa:
> af heilom hvat varð húnom [MS: *sonom*] mínom?'

[87] However, chapter 23, ed. Bertelsen, *Þiðriks saga*, I 46, II 63–5, does contain a narrative like this concerning the birth of Velent's father, and some transference may have taken place. For the story-type more generally, see Anne Burson, 'Swan Maidens and Smiths: A Structural Study of *Völundarkviða*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 55 (1983), 1–19, at 3–5.

> 'Tell it to me, Vǫlundr, *vísi* of *álfar*:
> what came of my healthy cubs?'
> (Stanza 32)

The phrase *vísi álfa* occurs only in Níðuðr's speeches, one preceding and one following Vǫlundr's vengeance. The repetition is significant, since in the first instance it helps to express Níðuðr's gloating, emphasising that he has captured an otherworldly being, but in the second, it emphasises his humbling by that being's revenge.[88] The phrase could equally be understood as 'leader of the *álfar*' or 'wise one of the *álfar*', and there is little to choose between these on internal evidence.[89] If the formula is related to the repeated alliteration of *Wēland* with *wīs* our Old English translation of the tenth *Metre* of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* and in chapter 19 of the associated prose *Consolation of Philosophy*, both times in an addition to Boethius's text, then *vísi* would be 'wise one' (this is unambiguous only in the prose, but surely holds also for the verse).[90] But the alliteration of these words was so obvious a device, even in prose, that the two formulae are likely to be independent.[91]

By contrast, the *ljóði* of 'álfa lióði' is unique, with no certain meaning.[92] *Ljóði* must be related to the rare and poetic *ljóðr* ('a people') and, amongst other cognates, the common Old English *lēod* (when masculine, 'man, warrior'; when feminine, 'people'). The usual assumption is that *ljóði* is a native Norse noun, guessed to mean 'leader', in which case Vǫlundr, 'leader of *álfar*', need not have been an *álfr* himself. However, borrowing from Old English is also possible. This is tempting both in view of *Vǫlundarkviða*'s other English connections and Dronke's observation that *álfa ljóði* is most closely paralleled in poetry surviving in the Germanic languages by the Old English poetic formula *genitive plural ethnonym + lēod*, as in *Ebrea lēod*, *Gēata lēod* and *Secgena lēod* ('male member of the Hebrews/Geats/Secgan').[93] Dronke was concerned that 'elves' are not 'associated with the term "people" (*ljóðr*, *lēod*) in ON or OE', but I demonstrate otherwise for Old English in the next chapter, emphasising the validity of the comparison.[94] That Old English *lēod* could be borrowed as *ljóði* is shown by the borrowing of Old English *hrēoðan* as Old Norse *hrjóða* (showing *ēo~jó*); *hīred*, *hīrd* as *hirð* (showing *d~ð*); and, amongst others, *belti*

88 Cf. Kaaren Grimstad, 'The Revenge of Vǫlundr', in *Edda: A Collocation of Essays*, ed. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, University of Manitoba Icelandic studies, 4 ([Manitoba]: University of Manitoba Press, 1983), pp. 187–209, at 198–9; Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, 257.

89 See Klaus von See *et al.*, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1997–), II 182–3, where the former interpretation is preferred.

90 Ed. Walter John Sedgefield, *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius, 'De consolatione philosophiae': Edited from the MSS., with Introduction, Critical Notes and Glossary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), pp. 46 (prose), 165 (poetry: lines 33, 35,42); cf. Claudio Moreschini (ed.), Boethivs: *De consolatione philosophiae, Opvscvla theologica* (Munich: Saur, 2000).

91 My interpretation here is diametrically opposite to McKinnell's ('The Context', 3): McKinnell considered that Alfred's *wīsan* is ambiguous between Old English *wīs* ('wise') and *wīsa* ('leader'), whereas it is not; but whereas McKinnell thought the parallel significant, I do not.

92 See von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, II 170–3; Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, 310–11.

93 For my translation of *lēod*, *contra* Dronke's 'leader', see Caroline Brady, '"Warriors" in *Beowulf*: An Analysis of the Nominal Compounds and an Evaluation of the Poet's Use of them', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 11 (1983), 199–246.

94 *Poetic Edda*, 311.

('girdle' < *belt*), *kastali* ('castle' < *castel*), *munki* ('monk' < *munuc*, showing weak masculine for strong).[95] *Álfa ljóði*, then, could be Norse in origin, but it is more likely a sign of the English influence, lexical and poetic, on *Vǫlundarkviða*. Either way, however, the balance of probability suggests that *álfa ljóði* indicates that Vǫlundr is one of the *álfar*.

Vǫlundr's association with *álfar* has caused some discomfort among critics who see him as a human hero, particularly since *Vǫlundarkviða*'s prose introduction states him and his brothers to be 'synir Finnakonungs' ('sons of the king of the *Finnar*').[96] I take this problem as the first of various pieces of evidence to be considered here that our categorial distinction between supernatural beings and ethnic others is anachronistic; we might think more usefully in terms of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'. In its manuscripts, *Vǫlundarkviða* unarguably keeps mythological company, as does the depiction of Vǫlundr on the Viking-age Swedish picture-stone Ardre VIII.[97] Individuals from the out-group are liable to be associated with the supernatural; supernatural beings are liable to be associated with out-groups. As I discuss further below, in some respects the closest parallel to Vǫlundr in our Scandinavian mythological material is the *áss* Óðinn.

The relevance of *Vǫlundarkviða* to contextualising Anglo-Saxon *ælfe*, then, is clear. *Vǫlundarkviða* is not a simple text, however. In particular, in the poem's opening stanzas, our perspective is with Vǫlundr as he faces a group of otherworldly females, but after the dissolution of Vǫlundr's own in-group, the audience's perspective is partially re-orientated to that of the Njárar, Bǫðvildr's people. This shift is of course part of what makes the poem powerful, but it emphasises that it has several narrative and thematic layers, which must be assessed with suitable subtlety. My analysis focuses on Vǫlundr's own otherworldly encounter with the *meyjar*, and his revenge upon Níðuðr.

Everything that happens in *Vǫlundarkviða* can arguably be traced back to the arrival, in its opening stanzas, of three *meyjar*:

[95] Jan De Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), s.vv. This argument is similar to McKinnell's, but McKinnell, 'The Context', 3, and 'Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian Northern England', in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21–30 August 1997*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), pp. 327–44, at p. 331, posited the etymon as Old English *lēoda*, putatively a weak derivative of *lēod* attested only in the plural, defined by Bosworth and Toller as 'a man, one of a people or country' (*Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s.v.; cf. T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), s.v.; De Vries, *ibid.*, s.v. *ljóði*). However, a weak etymon for *ljóði* is not required. Moreover, the *lēodan* forms should be taken simply as weak variants of *lēod*: morphologically, *lēod* was complex, having both masculine forms with long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem inflections (which were producing weak variants in other words already in Old English: see pp. 87–8) and feminine forms with *ō*-stem inflections, themselves liable to transferral to the weak declension (especially in Northumbrian with its loss of the final nasals which helped to distinguish weak inflections: see A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), §§379 n. 3, 472, 587, 610.7 n. 3, 617.

[96] Cf. von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, II 120–1; Grimstad, 'The Revenge', 190–1; McKinnell, 'The Context', 24–5; though note Dronke's untroubled juxtaposition of the two readings, *The Poetic Edda*, 261–2, 287–9.

[97] Ed. Sune Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*, Arkeol. monog., 28, 2 vols (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1941–2), I 95–6, 99, 107; II 22–4 and fig. 311.

Meyiar flugo sunnan, myrcvið í gognum,
alvitur ungar [MS *alvitr unga*], ørlǫg drýgia;
þær á sævar strǫnd settuz at hvílaz,
drósir suðrœnar, dýrt lín spunno.

Ein nam þeira Egil at veria,
fǫgr mær fira, faðmi liósom;
ǫnnor var Svanhvít, svanfiaðrar dró;
enn in þriðia, þeira systir,
varði hvítan háls Vǫlundar.[98]

Maidens flew from the south, through Myrkviðr, young *alvitur*, to follow/determine fate; on the shore of the sea/lake they paused to rest, southern ladies, they spun expensive linen.

One of them took Egill, to embrace/protect him, the fair maiden of men, to her bright breast; the second was Svanhvít (Swan-white), she cast off her swan-cloak; and the third, their sister, guarded the white neck of Vǫlundr.

Hines has argued that in Norse mythological literature,

> the power of the female, to captivate and outwit the male as well as in her special craft – spinning and weaving yarn and fate – is taken as one of the givens of the dramatic scene: the *ørlǫg seggia*, 'declaring of fate', that the *meyiar margs vitandi*, 'maidens knowing about many things', lay down for men.[99]

This certainly applies well to *Vǫlundarkviða*, while it is also worth noting that the association of women with shaping the future has Anglo-Saxon comparisons.[100] This female power to determine Vǫlundr's actions is symbolised by a ring: Vǫlundr makes it for his *mær*, arguably to bring her home; Níðuðr takes it, its absence making Vǫlundr imagine her to have returned, which leads to Vǫlundr being captured and hamstrung; Níðuðr gives it to Bǫðvildr, whose desire to have it mended leads her into Vǫlundr's power and to the culmination of Vǫlundr's revenge.[101] The first two stanzas, then, provide the necessary narrative conditions for the story as *Vǫlundarkviða* tells it; and they situate the beginnings of events with seductive otherworldly females. As McKinnell commented, 'it seems clear that the poet stresses the role of women in the story largely because his attitude to them is consistently suspicious; he portrays them as selfish [and] insincere'.[102]

Vǫlundarkviða's opening has received curiously little attention in the study of medieval Scandinavian supernatural females, but it is particularly interesting in the present context in view of my suggestion above that *álfar* can in some ways be taken as male counterparts to the *dísir*, while I argue below, on the

98 Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 117.
99 John Hines, 'Myth and Reality', 35.
100 On spinning see n. 62 above. On Anglo-Saxon material see in addition to chapter 5 n. 118 below Fred C. Robinson, 'The Prescient Woman in Old English Literature', in *'The Tomb of Beowulf' and Other Essays on Old English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 155–63 (repr. from *Philologica Anglica: Essays Presented to Professor Yoshio Terasawa on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Kinshiro Oshitari *et al.* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1988), pp. 241–50).
101 Cf. McKinnell, 'The Context', 16–19.
102 'The Context', 22.

basis of *Wið færstice*, for a similar pairing in Anglo-Saxon culture.[103] Studies of *Vǫlundarkviða* have instead emphasised comparison with folk-tales of swan-maidens, while McKinnell pointed to parallels with the Old French *fées*.[104] These comparisons are helpful, but should not be taken to exclude *Vǫlundarkviða*'s *meyjar* from mainstream traditions of Norse supernatural females: they are examples of a continuum of otherworldly females whom, as I have discussed above, we might generally label *dísir*. In particular, *Vǫlundarkviða*'s *meyjar* are similar to the three canonically mythological 'meyjar, margs vitandi' ('maidens, knowing much') coming from a *sær* ('large body of water') and shaping the fate of men in *Vǫluspá* stanza 20. They take Vǫlundr and his brothers into their protection, with the verbs *verja* ('cover, clothe, embrace') and *varða* ('guard, protect'), a motif well paralleled by the *dís* Sigrún in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, who, like *Vǫlundarkviða*'s *meyjar*, is also denoted with the unusual element *-vitr* (in *hjálmvitr*, st. 54; cf. *Sigrdrífumál*).[105]

That *Vǫlundarkviða*'s *meyjar*, following the pattern identified by Hines, also 'captivate and outwit the male' is also plausible. The language of action and protection which is applied to the maidens' seduction of the brothers conversely implies the brothers' disempowerment. This reading may elucidate a long-standing crux: why Vǫlundr's neck, as the *mær* puts her protective arms about it, is described as *hvítr*, when whiteness and brightness are almost invariably associated in Eddaic poetry with female rather than male beauty.[106] Motz saw the adjective to associate Vǫlundr with the swan-maidens, which it does, but her point does not detract from its connotations of femininity.[107] McKinnell argued that 'fair skin is probably an indication of noble birth here', on the basis of the description of the noble woman Móðir ('Mother') in stanza 29 of *Rígsþula*, declaring her

> brún biartari, brióst liósara,
> háls hvítari hreinni miǫllo.[108]

[103] Chapter 6. *Vǫlundarkviða* is, for example, omitted from the mythological surveys of De Vries (*Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*) and Turville-Petre (*Myth and Religion*), and the specialist studies of Ström (*Diser*) and Jochens (*Images of Women*); it was summarily dismissed by Riti Kroesen, 'The Valkyries in the Heroic Literature of the North', *Skáldskaparmál*, 4 (1997), 129–61 (at 137); and excluded by McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 5–6, on the grounds that it 'is almost certainly of non-Scandinavian origin'. Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, 301–2, at 301 stated likewise that 'it is important to note that the swan maidens of *Vkv* are not valkyries, although the prose prologue calls them so with great confidence', but her reading is ill-justified; cf. the circular argumentation in her note to stanza 15, lines 5–8 (p. 313).

[104] Helge Holmström, *Studier över svanjungfrumotivet i Volundarkvida och annorstädes* (Malmö: Maiander, 1919); Burson, 'Swan Maidens'; Lotte Motz, 'New Thoughts on *Vǫlundarkviða*', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 22 (1986–9), 50–68, at 52–8; McKinnell, 'The Context of *Vǫlundarkviða*', 16–17.

[105] Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 138, 189–97.

[106] To offer only a few examples, *Vǫlundarkviða*'s *meyjar* are *ljóss* ('light, bright'), as are women in *Hávamál* 92 and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 53; in *Hávamál*, Óðinn describes his desire for 'Billings mey . . . sólhvíta' ('Billingr's sun-white maid', st. 97), while Þórr's daughter is in *Alvíssmál* called 'miallhvíta man' ('the snow-white maid'; st. 7); *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* calls Sigrún 'sólbjǫrt' ('sun-bright'; st. 45) and 'hvít' ('white'; st. 48), the latter word being used also of Erna in *Rígsþula* (st. 39) and Svanhildr in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* (st. 55).

[107] Motz, '*Vǫlundarkviða*', 57.

[108] McKinnell, 'The Context', 9–10. Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 284.

> brow brighter, breast lighter,
> neck whiter than new-fallen snow.

But this associates Móðir's white neck inextricably with feminine beauty. Some have argued that associations of *álfar* and *ælfe* with beauty explain Vǫlundr's white neck, or that the whiteness is an echo of *álfr*'s etymological association with whiteness.[109] Both of these points may be true, but again they do not undermine *hvítr*'s synchronic feminine connotations; it seems to me that it is time to accept these connotations, and interpret them. As McKinnell has pointed out, mythological cross-gender encounters in Scandinavian narratives 'are usually morally ambiguous. The protagonist is rarely accorded uncritical admiration.'[110] The idea that Vǫlundr's masculinity is indeed compromised by *hvítr* is further consolidated by the only other major exception to the rule that only women are *hvítr* in Eddaic poetry: Heimdallr. *Þrymskviða* calls Heimdallr 'hvítastr ása' ('whitest of *æsir*'; st. 15); the same stanza also identifies him as one of the vanir, which suggests a further, albeit tantalising, connection between *vanir* and *álfar*.[111] *Þrymskviða* says

> Þá qvað þat Heimdallr, hvítastr ása –
> vissi hann vel fram, sem vanir aðrir – :
> 'Bindo vér Þór þá brúðar líni,
> hafi hann iþ micla men Brísinga!'[112]

> Then Heimdallr, the *hvítastr* of the *æsir* – he knew well what was to come, like the other *vanir* – said this: 'Then let's dress Þórr in a bridal veil, let him wear the great necklace of the *Brísingar*!'

Here, Heimdallr proposes that Þórr wear women's clothing to disguise himself as Freyja. As Þórr swiftly points out, doing so would prompt the accusation that he is *argr* (stanza 17), so it is surely appropriate that the suggestion comes from the *hvítastr ása*, arguably 'the most feminine of the *æsir*'.[113] This reading is admittedly hard to parallel, but this may be because in Christian culture *hvítr* took on important religious connotations of moral purity, submerging an older usage.[114] We may plausibly explain Vǫlundr's description as *hvítr* as an allusion to his disempowerment at the hands of seductive women. It is no surprise, then, that he is absent from the action when his brothers discover the departure of the swan-maidens, and that unlike them he does not set off in search of his partner but remains at home. Although we have no Old

[109] See von See *et al*., *Kommentar*, III 140; below chapter 2.

[110] *Meeting the Other*, 8.

[111] Helgi Hundingsbani is, while a boy, characterised in stanza 9 of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* as 'álmr ítrborinn, ynðis lióma' ('a high-born elm, a ray of delight'), and *Rígsþula* stanza 34 says of the child Jarl that 'bleict var hár, biartir vangar' ('pale was the hair, bright the cheeks'; ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 131, 285). But, prodigious though Helgi was, boys were not considered yet to be masculine (Clover, 'Regardless of Sex'), so these descriptions are to be distinguished from similar descriptions of grown men.

[112] Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 113.

[113] Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 113.

[114] See Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic–English Dictionary*, 2nd edn by William A. Craigie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), s.v.; Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, s.v.

English text like *Vǫlundarkviða*, the theme of Vǫlundr's disempowerment and arguably feminine characteristics, and his contrast with the powerful and proactive *meyjar*, will be of interest when we come to examine the Anglo-Saxon evidence for *ælfe*'s associations with feminine beauty, magic, and otherworldly females in chapter 5.

We may turn now to the perspective of Bǫðvildr and the group to which she belongs. As Grimstad observed, Vǫlundr's revenge against Níðuðr is reminiscent of Óðinn's in *Grímnismál* – a comparison which fits neatly with my argument here for the similarity of *álfar* to *æsir*.[115] In *Grímnismál*, Óðinn visits, incognito, the hall of the human king Geirrøðr, testing his hospitality. Geirrøðr tortures Óðinn between two fires. Óðinn is helped by Geirrøðr's son Agnarr, whom he rewards with mythological lore; he then reveals his identity and escapes, indirectly causing Geirrøðr's death as he does so.[116] Like Vǫlundr, Óðinn punishes a bad deed by taking revenge and escaping – Óðinn also rewarding a good deed – effectively acting as an arbiter of appropriate behaviour. According to *Grímismál*'s prose epilogue, Óðinn simply disappears, but Vǫlundr's escape by flight in bird-form is reminiscent of Óðinn's escapes in eagle-form in prose texts.[117] As I argue below, these texts provide a powerful model for understanding both *álfar* and *ælfe*.

In the course of avenging socially unacceptable behaviour, Vǫlundr shows himself to pose a sexual threat to a young woman of the in-group. This is consistent with the other narratives of otherworldly beings considered below, and with hints in the English traditions concerning the associations of *ælfe~elves*. Bǫðvildr's misfortune here, and her brothers', relates not only to their father's transgression, but also to their own decision to leave the safety of their immediate community to visit Vǫlundr on the island where he has been imprisoned: there may, then, be some encoding of Vǫlundr's threat in space. However, Bǫðvildr's case also allows us to infer more positive aspects in Vǫlundr's revenge. For Bǫðvildr, sex with Vǫlundr leads in other versions of the story to the birth of a hero, Vitki in *Þiðreks saga* and Widia in English tradition.[118] In another layer of meaning, then, shame is counterbalanced with pride, in a pattern well paralleled by Classical accounts of gods seducing mortal maidens.[119] It conceivably also provided a discourse through which unsanctioned pregnancy could be handled by a community.

All the same, Vǫlundr's experience in the second part of *Vǫlundarkviða* once more emphasises his disempowerment, stemming ultimately from

[115] Grimstad, 'Revenge', 193, 200–2; cf. McKinnell, 'The Context', 24–5.

[116] Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 56–68.

[117] *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 1, ed. Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, 4–5; *Heiðreks saga*, ch. 11, ed. Jón Helgason, *Heiðreks saga*, 83, 140 – though this may be cognisant of *Snorra Edda*: Alaric Hall, 'Changing Style and Changing Meaning: Icelandic Historiography and the Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 77 (2005), 1–30, at 4; available at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/2889/>.

[118] See *Waldere II*, lines 4, 9, ed. Arne Zettersten, *Waldere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 19; cf. *Deor* lines 1–12, ed. Kemp Malone, *Deor*, Methuen's Old English Library, 2, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1949), 23–4.

[119] See Mary R. Lefkowitz, 'Seduction and Rape in Greek Myth', in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993), pp. 17–37.

his seduction by the otherworldly *mær*. Such ambiguous characteristics in mythological heroes have troubled previous commentators, who have sometimes sought interpretative paths round them, but I think they demand to be faced and interpreted. Vǫlundr is captured in his sleep, he is hamstrung by a queen, and his sword is stolen. His revenge is commensurate with his disempowerment, involving the murder of boys and the seduction/rape of a girl; his escape is effected by transformation, not, as in stories of Óðinn, to an eagle, but, to judge by his webbed feet (*fitjar*, stanza 29), to some sort of waterfowl, more than anything like the *mær* who first seduced him.[120] While the seductive powers of women are arguably construed as threats to men in this poem, criticism falls also upon the men in each case for surrendering their independence of mind. These points suggest strongly that male supernatural beings might be associated with characteristics and activities which were normally deemed improper to members of the in-group, and will be important in establishing the relationship of *ælfe* to Anglo-Saxon gendering.

INTERPRETATIONS

We can now see *álfr* to have denoted something conceptually similar to *áss*, and both *æsir* and *álfar* to have been metaphorically associated with humans. *Grímnismál* declares that Freyr was given Álfheimr to rule, consolidating the circumstantial evidence that in a number of Eddaic poems the *álfar* relate to the *æsir* as the *vanir* do in Snorri's mythography, and some partial synonymy between *álfr* and *vanr* seems likely. The group *æsir–álfar–menn* was in turn systematically opposed to another group, at least sometimes anthropomorphic, which I have termed *monstrous*, including beings denoted by the partial synonyms *jǫtunn*, *dvergr* and *þurs*. *Vǫlundarkviða*, whose story seems certainly to be about one of the *álfar*, also suggests narrative motifs associated with *álfar*: intervention in the in-group's affairs to punish transgressions of proper behaviour; posing sexual threats; and compromised masculinity. To conclude this analysis of Norse evidence, I argue that my more basic observations concerning *álfr*'s semantics correlate with wider (albeit later) evidence for early-medieval Norse-speakers' cosmologies, and that we can correlate the semantics of key terms in Old Norse mythologies, including *álfr*, with wider world-views. Essentially, the semantic field diagram presented above (Figure 2) can also be taken as a schematic map of early-medieval Norse-speakers' cosmologies. This correlation provides support for taking similar approaches to Old English semantic evidence.

I have argued from skaldic evidence in particular that *álfar*, *æsir* and *menn* were semantically aligned with one another in contradistinction to monsters. This binary opposition corresponds well with a horizontal cosmology which scholars have deduced from our sources.[121] To quote Hastrup,

[120] Cf. Burson, 'Swan Maidens', 6–8, 11–12.

[121] De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II 372–92; A. Ya. Gurevich, 'Time and Space in the

> horizontally, the cosmos was divided into Miðgarðr and Útgarðr. Miðgarðr was the central space, as implied by the name {'middle-enclosure'}, inhabited by men (and gods), while Útgarðr was found 'outside the fence', beyond the borders of Miðgarðr, and inhabited by giants and non-humans. We note here the close parallel to the conceptualization of the farmstead (*innangarðs* {literally 'within the enclosure'}) and the surrounding uncontrolled space (*útangarðs* {literally 'outside the enclosure'}). According to the myths of creation, this initial division of cosmos into two separate spaces was brought about by the gods (*æsir*), who subsequently built their own abode, Ásgarðr, somewhere inside Miðgarðr. There was no opposition between heaven and earth in this model, and topologically Ásgarðr was inseparable from Miðgarðr. Consequently there was no absolute distinction between men and gods. In opposition to the men and the (controlled) gods stood the uncontrolled, often hostile, *jötnar* ('giants') and other kinds of supernatural beings.[122]

Inferring this binary system involves a number of simplifications. In particular, Kuhn warned that the terms *Miðgarðr*, *Ásgarðr* and *Útgarðr* may be comparatively late innovations in Norse; the proper noun *Útgarðr* is attested only once, in *Gylfaginning*, its systematic opposition with *Miðgarðr* being a scholarly construct.[123] However, our earliest Norse evidence does suggest a similar division into *Mannheimar*, *Goðheimar* and *Jǫtunheimar* ('Human-, *Goð*- and *Jǫtunn*-world(s)'), which, if we can assume that Goðheimar was within Mannheimar, is consistent with the system which Hastrup posited.[124] These three *heimar* correlate neatly with the three groups of beings which I have identified on semantic grounds, *æsir* and *álfar*, *menn*, and monsters. Although this kind of simple, binary cosmological paradigm is internationally widespread, it is by no means universal, differing – to give an important counterpoint – from the world-views implied by biblical Judaic writings.[125] The boundaries between the worlds were not rigid, varying according to contexts social (for example subsistence farming vs trading), temporal (for example day vs night), literary (for example, *historia* vs *fabula*), and so forth. While the model might be applied on a macrocosmic (or mythological) scale, it equally had a microcosmic dimension, with the farm a *miðgarðr* surrounded

Weltmodell of the Old Scandinavian Peoples', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 2 (1969), 42–53, at 42–7; E. Meletinskij, 'Scandinavian Mythology as a System, I', *Journal of Symbolic Anthropology*, 1 (1973), 43–57; 'Scandinavian Mythology as a System, II', *Journal of Symbolic Anthropology*, 2 (1973), 57–78; Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 136–54. Cf. Jens Peter Schjødt, 'Horizontale und vertikale Achsen in der vorchristlichen skandinavischen Kosmologie', in *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names, Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Encounters between Religions in Old Nordic Times and Cultic Place-Names Held at Åbo, Finland, on the 19th–21st August 1987*, ed. Tore Ahlbäck (Åbo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 1990), pp. 35–57; Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, esp. 1 48–56; McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, esp. 4–5.

122 Hastrup, *Culture and History*, 147.

123 Ed. Faulkes, *Gylfaginning*, 38–9.

124 Kuhn, 'Religionsgeschichte', IV 295–302.

125 See Hayden White, 'The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea', in *The Wild Man Within: An Image of Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, ed. Edward Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak ([Pittsburgh]: University of Pittsburgh, 1972), pp. 3–38; for further examples Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 22–30.

by a chaotic outer world.[126]

Within this broad binary paradigm, gods and monsters related to men in two main ways. As recent commentators have emphasised, mythological narratives of relationships between *æsir* and *jǫtnar* – which involve violence but also intermarriage – probably reflected, or provided models for, relations between Norse-speaking in-groups and their ethnically different neighbours, principally the *Finnar* ('Sámi').[127] Here, then, gods and monsters exist in parallel to in-groups and out-groups. But in another kind of relationship, gods and monsters were corporeal beings walking in men's world, whom men might in theory encounter. This is a more useful model for interpreting the Anglo-Saxon evidence for *ælfe*, since the most prominent material relates to their propensity to inflict illness on members of the in-group. Scandinavian gods and monsters were conceptually similar to, and might even be identified with, ethnic others, while members of the human in-group could, actually or metaphorically, become monstrous, particularly if they remained in contact with the in-group after the severances of outlawry or death.[128] That gods and

126 Cf. Gurevich, 'Time and Space', 43–5.

127 Else Mundal, 'Coexistence of Saami and Norse Culture – Reflected in and Interpreted by Old Norse Myths', in *Old Norse Myths, Literature & Society: Papers of the 11th International Saga Conference*, ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 2000), pp. 346–55; accessed from <http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/medieval/saga.html>, 8 October 2004; cf. 'The Perception of Saamis and their Religion in Old Norse Sources', in *Shamanism and Northern Ecology*, ed. Juha Pentikäinen, Religion and Society, 36 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), pp. 97–116, at 110–12; Hermann Pálsson, *Úr landnorðri: Samar og ystu rætur íslenskrar menningar*, Studia Islandica, 54 (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1997), esp. 16–23, 154–6; cf. Halvdan Koht, 'Var *finanne* alltid *finnar*?', *Maal og minne* (1923), 161–75; Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 1 60–6; more generally Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3–25, at 7–12; Michael Uebel, 'Unthinking the Monster: Twelfth-Century Responses to Saracen Alterity', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 264–91. For recent archaeological evidence for Norse–Sámi interactions which emphasises the validity of these parallels see also Anders Götherström, *Acquired or Inherited Prestige? Molecular Studies of Family Structures and Local Horses in Central Svealand during the Early Medieval Period*, Theses and Papers in Scientific Archaeology, 4 (Stockholm: The Archaeological Research Laboratory, Stockholm University, 2001), 25–6; chapter 2; accessed from <http://www.archaeology.su.se/pdf/agsamman.pdf>, 20 October 2004, 11–12; cf. Inger Zachrisson *et al.*, *Möten i gränsland: Samer och germaner i Mellanskandinavien*, Statens Historiska Museum / Stockholm Monographs, 4 (Stockholm: Statens Historiska Museum, 1997); Neil Price, 'Drum-Time and Viking Age: Sámi-Norse Identities in Early Medieval Scandinavia', in *Identities and Cultural Contacts in the Arctic: Proceedings from a Conference at the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, November 30 to December 2 1999*, ed. Martin Appelt, Joel Berglund and Hans Christian Gulløv, Danish Polar Center Publication, 8 (Copenhagen: Danish National Museum & Danish Polar Center, 2000), pp. 12–27, at 18–22.

128 Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 69–91; William Sayers, 'The Alien and Alienated as Unquiet Dead in the Sagas of the Icelanders', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 242–63; for outlawry cf. Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the 'Beowulf'-Manuscript* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 140–68; more generally Karin Olsen, 'Bragi Boddason's *Ragnarsdrápa*: A Monstrous Poem', in *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe*, ed. K. E. Olsen and L. A. R. J. Houwen, Mediaevalia Groningana, n.s. 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 123–39. For the partial synonymy of *Finnr* with monster-words, see Hermann Pálsson, *Úr landnorðri*, 18–20.

men were not essentially different is likewise well established for medieval Ireland, with Classical parallels.[129] This is the situation in *Vǫlundarkviða* and the canonically mythological *Grímnismál*, as well as various later sources, among them the *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum*, from around 1300, which says that 'er kunikt i ollum fornum frassognvm um þat folk, er Alfar hetv, at þat var miklu friðara en engi onnur mankind a Norðrlondum' ('it is made known in all the old histories of the people which is called the *Álfar*, that it was much more beautiful/handsome than any other human race in the North-lands').[130]

Admittedly, Barrett and Keil have shown that recalling and retelling narratives leads people to anthropomorphise incorporeal, omnipresent gods in ways which contradict their stated theological ideas, and our source material is predominantly narratives.[131] On the other hand, they also argued that the anthropomorphic God who emerges from recall and retelling better reflects people's intuitive, day-to-day conception. It is often assumed that Christian Scandinavians' depictions of the pagan gods as powerful humans with magical powers, as in the prologue to *Snorra Edda* or the first book of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, necessarily shows Christian euhemerisation of pagan divinities which had implicitly been more similar to the Christian God.[132] But I suspect

[129] On Ireland see A. G. van Hamel, 'Aspects of Celtic Mythology', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 20 (1934), 207–48, esp. 207–27; Marie-Louise Sjoestedt, *Gods and Heroes of the Celts*, trans. Myles Dillon (London: Methuen, 1949) (first publ. *Dieux et héros des Celtes* (Paris: Leroux, 1940)), esp. 92–3; Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Celtic Mythology and Religion', in *History and Culture of the Celts: Preparatory Conference, 25–28 October 1982 in Bonn, Lectures / Geschichte und Kultur der Kelten: Vorbereitungskonferenz 25.–28. Oktober 1982 in Bonn, Vorträge*, ed. Karl Horst Schmidt and Rolf Ködderitzsch (Heidelberg: Winter, 1986), pp. 241–51, esp. 245–51; cf. John Carey, 'Native Elements in Irish Pseudohistory', in *Cultural Identity and Cultural Integration: Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Doris Edel (Blackrock: Four Courts Press, 1995), pp. 45–60, at 53–4; *pace* J. P. Mackey, 'Magic and Celtic Primal Religion', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 45 (1992), 66–84, whose objections, where relevant, strike me as insubstantial. For Classical material note in addition to the discussion below the identification of *fauni* as Italy's *aborigines*, the primeval ancestors of the Romans (Stroh, 'Vom Faunus', 565–6). Though much ridiculed, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century demythologisations of fairies as past races (on which see Lewis Spence, *British Fairy Origins* (London: Watts, 1946), 53–64, 115–31, and Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), 5–7) were not so far off the mark.

[130] Ed. af Petersens and Olson, *Sǫgur Danakonunga*, 25, with slight normalisation; see also Annette Lassen, 'Den prosaiske Odin: Fortidssagaerne som mytografi', in *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney, Nordiska texter och undersökningar, 28 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, Institutionen för Nordiska Språk, 2003), pp. 205–19; John Lindow, 'Cultures in Contact', in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilisation, 14 ([Odense]: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), pp. 89–109, at 105.

[131] Justin L. Barrett and Frank C. Keil, 'Conceptualizing a Nonnatural Entity: Anthropomorphism in God Concepts', *Cognitive Psychology*, 31 (1996), 219–47; cf. Justin L. Barrett, 'Cognitive Constraints on Hindu Concepts of the Divine', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37 (1998), 608–19.

[132] Notably Krag, *Historiske kilder*, 58–9; David F. Johnson, 'Euhemerisation versus Demonisation: The Pagan Gods and Ælfric's *De falsis diis*', in *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe: Proceedings of the Second Germania Latina Conference Held at the University of Groningen, May 1992*, ed. T. Hofstra, L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald, Mediaevalia Groningana, 16 / Germania Latina, 2 (Groningen: Forsten, 1995), pp. 35–69, at 42–4.

that the 'euhemerisations' in our Norse sources involved no paradigm shift from traditional culture. Indeed, the euhemerised gods of Snorri Sturluson and the Old English translation of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*, unlike those of other early-medieval euhemerists, deliberately use their magical powers to establish divine reputations, rather than simply being apotheosised after their deaths, perhaps suggesting that Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians altered their inherited conceptions of pagan gods to a minimal extent.[133]

A more subtle supplement to the binary model is required to interpret how men of the in-group related to gods and to monsters. A convincing one is suggested by the relationships between the Hellenic citizens of the city-states, wild beings such as satyrs and nymphs (*Σάτυροι*, *Νύμφαι*), and barbarians and monsters such as the centaurs or cyclopes (*Κένταυροι*, *Κύκλωπες*), in ancient Hellenic world-views.[134] As Bartra put it, the mythology implies

> the existence of a mythological space inhabited by wild men that are clearly distinguishable from barbarians. In contrast with barbarians, who constituted a threat to society in general and to Greek society as a whole, the wild man represented a threat to the individual. . . White clearly demonstrates that, conventionally, barbarian lands were geographically remote, and the moment of their incursion upon the frontiers of the Greek world would signal an apocalypse: the appearance of hordes of barbarians implied the fracturing of the foundation of the world and the death of an epoch. In contrast the wild man is omnipresent, inhabiting the immediate confines of the community. He is found in the neighbouring forests, mountains and islands.[135]

This is undeniably a grand tidying up of the evidence; a full investigation would develop Buxton's self-consciously pluralistic approaches to Hellenic mythological landscapes.[136] But the model is convincing and ethnographically paralleled.[137] In it, the role of the barbarians is identical to that of the *jǫtnar* in Old Norse material concerning the Ragnarǫk, recalling Old Norse-speakers' binary division between humans and monsters and their alignment of monsters with ethnic others.[138] The wild men, however, fall between Hellenic citizens and barbarians, affording a neat parallel for the *álfar*. Like the wild men and in contradistinction to monsters, Óðinn in *Grímnismál* and Vǫlundr in *Vǫlundarkviða* are not threats to humanity itself, but to individual people.

133 See Johnson, 'Euhemerisation', 43–4; ch. 38 of the Old English translation of the *De consolatione philosophiae*, ed. Sedgefield, *Boethius*, 115–16, 194–5.

134 White, 'Wildness'; Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*, trans. Carl T. Berrisford (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 9–41; Ken Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology* (London: Routledge, 1992), 123–36, 158–61. Cf. Stefan Brink, 'Mythologizing Landscape: Place and Space of Cult and Myth', in *Kontinuitäten und Brüche in der Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Anders Hultgård zu seinen 65. Geburtstag am 23.12.2001 in Verbindung mit Olof Sundqvist und Astrild van Nahl*, ed. Michael Strausberg, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde, 31 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 76–112, at 83–5.

135 Bartra, *Wild Men*, 14, citing White, 'Wildness'.

136 *Imaginary Greece*, 80–113, cf. 197, 205–7; Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 403–60.

137 See Helms, *Ulysses' Sail*, 23–4.

138 On the Ragnarǫk see De Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, II 392–405; Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 280–5.

Whereas the threat of the monsters is chaotic and final, the threats posed by Óðinn and Vǫlundr serve to punish transgressions of acceptable behaviour, and to warn those who hear of them against similar transgressions.

Ethnic others in early-medieval Scandinavian world-views need not only have been identified with monsters. The *Írar* ('Irish') are associated in the sagas with positive supernatural powers and worlds. Both *Finnar* and *Írar* may threaten members of the in-group, but, at least at times, in ordered threats to transgressing individuals.[139] Non-monstrous but supernaturally empowered ethnic others, gods, wild men and so forth can be seen in some ways as one conceptual group, conveniently labelled *otherworldly*. Lindow considered that readings of this sort are 'incompatible' with the association of *jǫtnar* with the *Finnar*/Sámi, but I think rather that we have variation.[140] It might be attributed to chronological, social or regional factors, but also to the slippery nature of the concepts involved. As Cohen argued, 'representing an anterior culture as monstrous justifies its displacement or extermination by rendering the act heroic', and in contexts of conflict, one might expect the monstrous potentialities of *Finnar* to gain prominence.[141] The same point stands, *mutatis mutandis*, for pagan gods faced with Christianisation. On the other hand, social contact in a stable, if uneasy, co-existence might promote instead the otherworldly potentialities of neighbouring peoples. We should, then, view our model as a cline between two poles, the extremes marked by men of the human in-group on the one hand and monstrous beings on the other:

−MONSTROUS			+MONSTROUS
human in-group	gods etc.	ethnic others	*jǫtnar* etc.

Figure 3. Monstrosity in medieval Scandinavia

This cline puts ethnic others in a suitably ambiguous position, from which they might be associated either with gods and the like or with monsters.

This handling of the Norse evidence does not incorporate all of the complicating detail which could be adduced, such as vertical cosmological elements, other words for supernatural beings in Norse, or the place of gender. I advance these models, therefore, only tentatively as a reconstruction of world views in any given variety of medieval Scandinavian culture. However, I do think that they suggest an acceptable range of likelihoods for the ways in which

[139] On *Finnar*, John Lindow, 'Supernatural Others and Ethnic Others: A Millennium of World View', *Scandinavian Studies*, 67 (1995), 8–31; cf. 'Cultures in Contact' and the inclusion of *Vǫlundarkviða* in Else Mundal, 'The Perception of Saamis and their Religion in Old Norse Sources', in *Shamanism and Northern Ecology*, ed. Juha Pentikäinen, Religion and Society, 36 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), pp. 97–116; on *Írar* Hermann Pálsson, *Keltar á Íslandi* ([Reykjavík]: Háskólaútgáfan, 1996), 139–49; cf. Jónas Kristjánsson, 'Ireland and the Irish in Icelandic Tradition', in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Raghnall Ó Floinn (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), pp. 259–76, at 268–74. See further pp. 134–9, 144–5 below.

[140] Lindow, 'Cultures in Contact', 103 n. 2.

[141] Cohen, 'Monster Culture', 7–8.

concepts of *álfar* related to those of *æsir*, *menn* and *jǫtnar*, and to discourses of group identity. They also show how semantic evidence for the meanings of these words indeed reflects Scandinavian world-views as attested by other kinds of evidence, providing a framework for exploring the earliest Old English evidence for the meanings of *ælf* and *ælfe*.

2

The Earliest Anglo-Saxon Evidence

BY investigating the Norse evidence for *álfr*, it has been possible to reconstruct some of *álfr*'s earliest meanings and relationships with the main semantic fields which it bordered or overlapped. We may turn now to *álfr*'s Old English cognate. Reconstructing pre-conversion meanings of *ælf* is difficult, and attempts hitherto have been either too tentative or too speculative to be useful. But *ælf* had a prominent place in the Old English system of dithematic personal names, and was also involved in the Old English morphological reorganisation of etymological long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems around the seventh century. These sources provide evidence correlating almost exactly with the early Scandinavian evidence for the meanings of *álfr*, the correlation in turn suggesting that we may be able to adduce other conclusions from the Norse material to early Anglo-Saxon world-views. Thus, this chapter not only provides a basic picture of the early meanings of *ælf* against which to seek evidence for subsequent continuity and change, but considers a key aspect of the place of *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon culture. Those desiring more contextualisation of the linguistic issues discussed here will find guidance in Appendix 1 below.

I contextualise my findings with reference to *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* explicitly situates *ælfe* in a vividly realised world of men and monsters. The poem provides remarkable insights into how supernatural beings could feature in Anglo-Saxon constructions of the world, in large part consolidating the arguments which I make on the basis of early Old English and Norse evidence. However, the early evidence for the meanings of *ælf* also makes it possible to argue that *Beowulf* was to some extent innovative: specifically, its alignment of *ælfe* with monsters and demons can be seen to reflect demonisation following Christianisation in Anglo-Saxon culture.

ETYMOLOGY

Both cognate and internal Old English evidence demands a masculine Common Germanic nominative singular */ɑlβi-z/ (alongside a variant */ɑlβɑ-z/) denoting some kind of supernatural being (see Appendix 1). Grimm observed that its obvious Indo-European cognates, deriving from a base */ɑlb^{h}-/, are connected semantically by whiteness, and it must originally have meant 'white one'.[1] Close relatives are Latin *albus* ('(matt) white'); Old Irish *ailbhín* ('flock');

[1] *Teutonic Mythology*, II 444. An alternative etymology derives *ælf* from a variant of Indo-European

Albanian *elb* ('barley'); and Germanic words for 'swan' such as Old English *ylfetu*.[2] However, the etymology is not in itself very revealing: innumerable explanations could be hypothesised for the association of supernatural beings with whiteness. Grimm took the whiteness to imply positive moral connotations and noted the congruence with Snorri Sturluson's *ljósálfr*, and although I have concluded that the *ljósálfar* were influenced by angels, we might equally invoke *álfrǫðull*, denoting the sun, as evidence for an ancient association of *álfar* with light.[3] However, the closer relatives of **alβiz*, while suggesting whiteness, do not suggest lucidity. I have discussed above how the only adult males in the Poetic Edda to be described by the usual Old Norse word for 'white', *hvítr*, are the *álfr* Vǫlundr and the *vanr* Heimdallr – and that this description seems to connote a lack of masculinity, a characteristic which is hinted at in a range of our Old English evidence for *ælfe*. At any rate, the Indo-European etymology of *ælf* must be explained by our medieval data, and not *vice versa*.

PERSONAL NAMES

We do have some early evidence for the meanings of *ælf*, however, in names. Some names in the early Germanic languages were monothematic – having only one element – and these are often obscure and problematic, and of little use here.[4] However, the early Germanic languages had a rich tradition of

l̥bhu, presumably with an *a*-colouring laryngeal, an etymon supposedly evidenced by Sanskrit *ṛ̥bhu* ('clever, skilful, inventive, prudent', but also, as N. D. Kazanas, 'Indo-European Deities and the *Rgveda*', *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 29 (2001), 257–93, has discussed at p. 274, the name of a deity and by extension a class of deities), since Sanskrit *ṛ* can derive not only from Indo-European */ɾ̩/, but also Indo-European */l̩/. Bizarrely, this is the only etymology for *ælf* in the *OED* (s.v. *elf*), which perhaps helps to explain the occasional support still voiced for the idea (for example, Kazanas, *ibid*., 276; Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, 261–2). But, as Peters, 'OE *ælf*', 252–3, showed, *ṛ̥bhu* affords slender evidence for a possible etymon of *ælf*; it is admittedly short of likely cognates (see Manfred Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen / A Concise Etymological Sanskrit Dictionary*, 4 vols (Heidelberg: Winter, 1956–80), s.v. *ṛ̥bhúḥ*), but *ælf* will not solve this problem (cf. Albert L. Lloyd and Otto Springer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Althochdeutschen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprech, 1988–), s.v. *alb*). Lise Menn, 'Elvish Loanwords in Indo-European: Cultural Implications', in *An Introduction to Elvish*, ed. Jim Allen (Hayes: Bran's Head Books, 1978), pp. 143–51, has suggested at p. 143 that the root */ɑlbʰ/ is itself a loan from Sindarin *alph* ('swan'). This raises some intriguing possibilities. However, her argument that Old English *ylfetu* preserves the original meaning is hard to sustain in view of the full range of Indo-European evidence and *ylfetu*'s obviously secondary character: for its suffix see Joseph B. Voyles, *Early Germanic Grammar: Pre-, Proto-, and Post-Germanic Languages* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1992), §§7.2.8, 7.2.32.

2 Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols (Bern: Francke, 1959–69), 1 s.vv. *albhi-*, cf. *albho-*.

3 *Teutonic Mythology*, II 444.

4 On these see principally Mats Redin, *Studies on Uncompounded Personal Names in Old English*, Uppsala Universitets årsskrift 1919: Filosofi, språkvetenskap och historiska vetenskaper, 2 (Uppsala: Akademiska Bokhandeln, 1919); now also J. Insley, 'Pre-Conquest Personal Names', *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, ed. Herbert Jankula *et al*., 2nd rev. edn (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968–), esp. §§2, 4c. For *ælf* in monothematic personal names see Alaric Hall, 'Are There Any Elves in Anglo-Saxon Place-Names?', *Nomina*, 29 (2006), 61–80 , available at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/3146/>, at pp. 68–9; cf. pp. 74–5.

dithematic personal names, formed according to a shared naming-system comprising name-elements drawn from the common lexicon.[5] Since its reflexes occur in names throughout the Germanic languages, we may number **alβiz* among these, and such names may afford evidence for the semantics of *ælf*.[6] The presence of the word in Germanic names is paralleled by the presence of its cognate *albio-* in Celtic ones (for example, *Albiorīx*), and might reflect earlier Indo-European usage or be based on directly Celtic (as with the borrowing of Celtic **rīks* ('ruler') as both a common noun and a name element).[7] Regardless of its ultimate origin, however, it is possible to analyse the presence of **alβiz* in the Germanic naming system as a synchronically significant element.

Germanic dithematic name-formation was controlled in three main ways: dynastic relations might be expressed through repetition or alliteration of name-elements between generations; some elements usually only occurred finally (as generics), while others, including *ɑlβi-, usually only occurred initially (as modifiers); and, according to conventional wisdom, there was a strong preference for second elements whose grammatical gender corresponded with the sex of the name-bearer.[8] This naming-system was maintained in Old English. In day-to-day usage, of course, names doubtless primarily denoted their bearers rather than being lexically meaningful compounds, and Germanic names probably always included elements which were not transparently meaningful, either because they had been borrowed from other languages or because linguistic changes had rendered once-transparent elements obscure.[9] It is also clear that by the end of the Old English period, dithematic names were generally of fixed form and, undergoing sound-changes and reductions not found widely elsewhere in the lexicon, had often

5 For surveys of Anglo-Saxon naming practices, see most recently Insley, 'Pre-Conquest Personal Names'; also Cecily Clark, 'Onomastics', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Volume 1: The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. Richard M. Hogg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 452–89; Peter R. Kitson, 'How Anglo-Saxon Personal Names Work', *Nomina*, 25 (2002), 91–13; cf. Fran Colman, *Money Talks: Reconstructing Old English*, Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs, 56 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992), 12–69.

6 See William George Searle, *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum: A List of Anglo-Saxon Proper Names from the Time of Beda to that of King John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897), 6–30 (summarised by Jente, *Mythologischen Ausdrücke*, 170–1); Ernst Förstemann, *Altdeutsches Namenbuch*, rev. edn, 2 vols (Bonn: [n. pub.], 1900–16), I s.v. *alfi*, supplemented by Henning Kaufmann, *Altdeutsche Personennamen Ergänzungsband* (Munich: Fink, 1968), s.v.; Lind, *Norsk-isländska dopnamn*, cols 11–14, 16; *Norsk-isländska dopmnamn ock fingerade namn från medeltiden: supplementband* (Oslo: Dybwad, 1931), cols 1, 18.

7 For **rīks* see Green, *Language and History*, 150–1.

8 On dynastic relations see Henry Bosley Woolf, *The Old Germanic Principles of Name-Giving* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), 246–59; Max Keil, *Altisländische Namenwahl*, Palaestra: Untersuchungen und Texte aus der deutschen und englischen Philologie, 176 (Leipzig: Mayer & Müller, 1936), esp. 6–26, 109–26). For gender in Old English names see Searle, *Onomasticon*, xiii; Clark, 'Onomastics', 457. Fran Colman, 'Names Will Never Hurt Me', in *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely'; Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*, edited by M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 13–28, argues at pp. 13–17 for a tendency for elements' genders to be changed to fit the gender of the name-bearer, however; cf. Kitson, 'Anglo-Saxon Personal Names,' 97, 99, 100.

9 Colman, *Money Talks*, 12–16; cf. Nigel F. Barley, 'Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Names', *Semiotica*, 11 (1974), 1–31, at 1–13.

become opaque as lexically meaningful compounds.[10] But for most of the Old English period, the vast majority of dithematic names were evidently lexically transparent and potentially lexically meaningful – as a number of puns and literal translations into Latin attest.[11]

The potentially complex relationship between name-elements and their lexical counterparts certainly encourages caution in using personal names to reconstruct *ælf*'s lexical meanings. Thus it is considered unlikely that patterns in the pairings of elements in Old English names reflect the elements' lexical meanings.[12] This assumption is not unassailable: although, for example, the precise interpretation of the name *Gūthlāc* as 'belli munus' ('gift of battle') by Saint Guthlac's Anglo-Saxon hagiographer Felix demonstrates a syntagmatic understanding of a dithematic personal name; I have discussed the distinctive syntagmatic relationship of *-arinn* ('altar') with *Álf-* and *Þór-* in Old Norse names above.[13] But resolving the difficulties of this approach is far beyond my current scope. Likewise, it is possibly of interest that elements such as *ælf* and *ōs*, like for example *æðel* ('noble'), occur only as modifiers, and never as generics: taking names as lexically meaningful compounds, this implies that a name-bearer might be like an *ælf*, but never be an *ælf* him- or herself. Meanwhile, certain name-elements were associated with certain degrees of social status, which in turn might in theory have some connection with their semantics. That *ælf* appeared in the names of kings and nobles is certain; how far down the social scale the element was used, or how widely among different aristocratic groups, is harder to ascertain. The prospects for studying such correlations systematically have

10 Colman, *Money Talks*, 55–67; cf. Clark, 'Onomastics', 461; Kitson, 'Anglo-Saxon Personal Names', 105–6; Insley, 'Pre-Conquest Personal Names', §4e.

11 See Fred C. Robinson, 'The Significance of Names in Old English Literature', *Anglia*, 86 (1968), 14–58, at 35–57; 'Personal Names in Medieval Narrative and the Name of Unferth in *Beowulf*', in *'The Tomb of Beowulf' and Other Essays on Old English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) (first publ. in *Essays in Honor of Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams*, ed. Howard Creed (Birmingham, AL: Birmingham–Southern College, 1970), pp. 43–8); Anne Leslie Harris, 'Hands, Helms, and Heroes: The Role of Proper Names in *Beowulf*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 83 (1982), 414–21.

12 Woolf, *Old Germanic Principles*, 263–4; Hilmer Ström, *Old English Personal Names in Bede's History: An Etymological-Phonological Investigation*, Lund Studies in English, 8 (Lund: Gleerup, 1939), 44; Barley, 'Perspectives', esp. 13; Kitson, 'Anglo-Saxon Personal Names', 99–100. *Contra*, for example, Gottfried Schramm, *Namenschatz und Dichtersprache: Studien zu den zweigliedrigen Personennamen der Germanen*, Ergänzungshefte zur Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiet der indogermanischen Sprachen, 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 135, who compared *Ælfflæd*, etymologically '*ælf*-beautiful', with the poetic compound *ælfscȳne*, literally '*ælf*-beautiful', as if the correlation were significant evidence for the semantics of *ælf* (cf. Jente, *Mythologischen Ausdrücke*, 172; Stuart, 'The Anglo-Saxon Elf', 316). It has also been suggested that *engel* ('angel') was introduced to Old High German names as a replacement for *alp*, perhaps suggesting some semantic correspondence (and distinctions) between the two: Thomas Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology: Illustrative of the Romance and Superstition of Various Countries*, rev. edn (London: Bohn, 1850), vii, 66 first note; Michael Mitterauer, *Ahnen und Heilige: Namengebung in der europäischen Geschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1993), pp. 224–30. A systematic analysis would be required to establish this convincingly.

13 W. F. Bolton, 'The Background and Meaning of *Guthlac*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 61 (1962), 595–603, is the principal supporter of Felix's reading. Robinson, 'The Significance of Names', 43–9, saw the *belli munus* meaning to operate in the Old English poem *Guthlac A*, while apparently maintaining scepticism as to the true plausibility of Felix's interpretation.

now been improved inestimably by the initial publication of the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*. But to examine them in sufficient detail to contribute to our understanding of *ælf* would be an undertaking for another book.

Even accepting these constraints, however, it is possible plausibly to derive some semantic information from Anglo-Saxon personal names. The range of elements available for Anglo-Saxon dithematic name-formation was limited, and it is generally assumed that these name-elements lexically denoted things or attributes with positive cultural associations.[14] It is agreed, therefore, that we are to at least some extent dealing with a semantically defined system, and its inclusion of *ælf* can be analysed from this perspective. The fact that *ælf* is a common initial element in Old English dithematic personal names such as *Ælfrēd* and *Ælfrīc* has long been understood to suggest a benign aspect for *ælfe*.[15] This hypothesis can be tested with a systematic survey. The basis for Old English name-studies is still Searle's *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum*, which is greatly flawed.[16] But, supplemented with later works and used with due circumspection, it still gives a good idea of the range of name-elements available in Anglo-Saxon dithematic naming practices.[17] I survey only initial

14 Clark, 'Onomastics', 457–8; cf. Kitson, 'Anglo-Saxon Personal Names', 97. North, *Heathen Gods*, 54, has suggested that *ælf* occured in names to ward off the threat of demonic *ælfe*. The distinction between seeking a deity's support and seeking to avert his or her displeasure is admittedly blurry, but North's idea does not account for the absence from names of words for monsters which certainly denoted threats, discussed below, and conflicts with the inclusion of *Þórr, álfr, áss*, etc. in pagan Scandinavian personal names, where these denote primarily beneficent forces. In any case, this study shows that *ælf* and its reflexes retained positive connotations in many speech-communities throughout medieval English, so its retention in names need have involved no serious semantic conflict. For the lack of change in Norse personal names, and the argument that Christianisers were not interested in this aspect of culture, see John Kousgård Sørensen, 'The Change of Religion and the Names', in *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names, Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Encounters between Religions in Old Nordic Times and Cultic Place-Names Held at Åbo, Finland, on the 19th–21st August 1987*, ed. Tore Ahlbäck (Åbo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 1990), pp. 394–403, at 394–7).

15 For example, Bruce Dickins, 'English Names and Old English Heathenism', *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, 19 (1933), 148–60, at 156–7; Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 51; Nils Thun, 'The Malignant Elves: Notes on Anglo-Saxon Magic and Germanic Myth', *Studia Neophilologica*, 41 (1969), 378–96, at 392; Stuart, 'The Anglo-Saxon Elf', 314; Lecouteux, *Nains et elfes*, 153.

16 See John Insley, 'The Study of Old English Personal Names and Anthroponymic Lexika', in *Person und Name: Methodische Probleme bei der Erstellung eines Personennamenbuches des Frühmittelalters*, ed. Dieter Geuenich, Wolfgang Haubrichs and Jörg Jarnut, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde, 32 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), pp. 148–76.

17 I also use Walter de Gray Birch, *Index Saxonicus: An Index to All the Names in 'Cartularium Saxonicum: A Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History'* (London: Phillimore, 1899); Ström's analysis of Old English personal names in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (*Old English Personal Names*, itself supplemented particularly by O. S. Anderson (ed.), *Old English Material in the Leningrad Manuscript of Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, Skrifter utgivna av Kungl. Humanistika Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund / Acta Regiae Societatis Humaniorum Litterarum Lundensis, 31 (Lund: Gleerup, 1941), pp. 67–74, and T. J. M. van Els, *The Kassel Manuscript of Bede's 'Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum' and its Old English Material* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), pp. 115–77); Colman's study and catalogue of moneyers' names in the reign of Edward the Confessor (*Money Talks*); K. S. B. Keats-Rohan and David E. Thornton, *Domesday Names: An Index of Latin Personal and Place Names in Domesday Book* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997); the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, <http://www.pase.ac.uk>, accessed 21 June 2006 *et passim*, and comparison with naming in cognate languages (by reference to Förstemann, *Altdeutsches*

elements, since *ælf* does not occur finally, establishing an inclusive list of Old English words which could denote animate beings and which occur as protothemes in Anglo-Saxon personal names.[18] I divide it for convenience into five semantic groups, marking words which occur as protothemes in Anglo-Saxon names less than ten times in Searle's *Onomasticon* with an asterisk (*) as a crude indicator of rarity (most are either substantially more or less common than this). Words which may not belong in the category in which they are placed, or in the survey at all, are marked with a question mark (?) and where necessary discussed in the footnotes:

Person: ?ār* ('messenger'),[19] beorn ('man'), bregu ('lord'), cwēn ('woman'), ?cyn(e),[20] ?frēa* ('lord'),[21] ?frēo ('lady'),[22] gīsl ('hostage'), ?gyst* ('guest'), gum ('man' < *guma*), hæl* ('man' < *hæle*), ?helm ('protector'),[23] hyse* (young man'), lēod ('man'), mǣg ('kinsman'), mann ('person'), ?rinc* ('man'),[24] scealc* ('man'), þegn* ('thegn'), weard* ('guard'), wine ('friend').

People(s): Angel,[25] ?Cent* (< *Cantiaci*),[26] cynn ('family'), Dene, dryht ('warband, people'), folc ('army, people'), ?folþ* ('retinue' < *folgoþ*),[27] Gēat*,[28] ?hād* ('rank; tribe'),[29] here ('army'), hlōþ* ('company'),[30] nōþ* ('warband'),[31] Peoht, Seax,[32] Swæf,

Namenbuch, I; Kaufmann, *Altdeutsche Personennamen*; Lind, *Norsk-isländska dopnamn*).

18 *Contra* Searle, *Onomasticon*, s.vv. *Beorelf, Heorælf*. Searle's forms occur in place-names in S1536, now Barlaston (Staffs) or Barlestone (Leics) and Harlaston (Staffs), too unusual to be useful (numbers prefixed by *S* refer to items in S. E. Kelly, *The Electronic Sawyer: An Online Version of the Revised Edition of Sawyer's 'Anglo-Saxon Charters', Section One [S 1–1602]* (British Academy / Royal Historical Society Joint Committee on Anglo-Saxon Charters, 1999): <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/chartwww/eSawyer.99/eSawyer2.html>, accessed 19 May 2006). Cognates of *ælf* seem not to occur as second elements in medieval German personal-names: 'das in Vollnamen als Zweitglied erscheinende "-alp, -alf" kann unmöglich zu ɑlβi- gehören. Denn die Regel, daß vokalisch anlautende Zweitglieder gemieden werden, duldet nackweislich keine Ausnahme' ('the element "-alp, -alf" which appears in dithematic names as a second element cannot possibly be related to ɑlβi-. For the rule that second elements beginning in vowels are avoided demonstrably permits no exceptions'; Kaufmann, *Altdeutsche Personennamen*, 29).

19 If a genuine element, this seems more likely, however, to be the word meaning 'honour' (Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 6–7).

20 *Cyne-* in Old English usually means 'royal', but possibly in early personal names shared the meaning of its Old Icelandic cognate *konr* ('man (of noble birth)'; Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 11–12).

21 Unless denoting the Old English counterpart of Freyr.

22 More likely, however, is the meaning 'noble, free', which seems to be required by cognates (Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 16); some occurrences could be variants of *frēa*.

23 This can denote armour as well as people (see Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 21).

24 Attestations may be forms of *hring*.

25 Possibly an eponymous ancestor. Sometimes perhaps 'angel', in which case it belongs under 'Supernatural being' if it is not excluded as a loan-word.

26 More probably to be understood as the name of the kingdom, names in *Cent-* being understood as nicknames (Clark, 'Onomastics', 460).

27 This relies both on the etymology being correct, and the exclusion of the equally obvious sense 'service'.

28 Possibly an eponymous ancestor (cf. Colman, *Money Talks*, 76).

29 Or possibly 'personality', in which case it belongs here, if at all, under 'Person'.

30 This etymology is open to question (Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 23–4), but not seriously to doubt (Anderson, *Old English Material*, 68).

31 This is a rare meaning and 'daring; plunder' more likely, in which case the word should be excluded.

32 Unless an eponymous ancestor or 'dagger' (see Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 33).

þēod ('people'), ?Wealh,[33] Wendel*,[34] Wern.

Animal: ?dēor ('wild animal'),[35] earn ('eagle'), eofor* ('boar'),[36] eoh ('horse'),[37] fisc* ('fish'), gōs* ('goose'), ?hūn ('cub'),[38] hund* ('dog'), seolh* ('seal'),[39] ?stūt* ('gnat'), wulf ('wolf').

Supernatural being: ælf, god ('god'),[40] ōs, ?regen ('gods'),[41] ?rūn* ('otherworldly female').[42]

Unclassified: wiht ('being'),[43] wyrm ('worm, snake, maggot, dragon').[44]

Many details of this selection are problematic. Nevertheless, some useful points emerge, and are not blurred by my inclusion of dubious elements. Of the words denoting beings used as protothemes in Old English dithematic names, most lexically denote people or peoples and so are self-evidently semantically

33 Unless 'foreigner; slave', in which case it belongs under 'Person' (see Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 38).

34 Unless an eponymous ancestor.

35 Unless 'beloved; precious' or 'brave, fierce', in which case it should be excluded.

36 As Kitson noted ('Anglo-Saxon Personal Names', 116), although Searle gave numerous references to *Eofor*-names, most come from Continental sources, in accordance with his exasperating inclusion of Continental names in (sometimes incorrectly) Anglicised form (cf. Insley, 'Old English Personal Names', 158–9). Colman, *Money Talks*, and Birch, *Index Saxonicus*, record no example of *Eofor-* or its variants.

37 This is probable but not certain (see Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 14–15).

38 Unless this is the cognate of the ethnonym *Hun* (see Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 24–5; Colman, *Money Talks*, 103).

39 See Colman, *Money Talks*, 112.

40 <god> may at times represent *gōd* ('good'); comparative evidence, however, puts it beyond doubt that at least some examples represent *god* ('god'; Förstemann, *Altdeutsches Namenbuch*, 1 s.vv. *goda*, *guda*; Kaufmann, *Altdeutsche Personennamen Ergänzungsband*, s.vv. *gōda*, *gŭda*; Mitterauer, *Ahnen und Heilige*, 222–3; cf. Colman, *Money Talks*, 98).

41 Unless in the meaning 'advice' or as an intensifier (Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 32).

42 Unless 'rune; counsel'. *Rūn* is common finally and is usually taken in this position to reflect a usage of *rūn* and its cognates as the second element in words denoting otherworldly females, attested in all the branches of Germanic (cf. Schramm, *Namenschatz und Dichtersprache*, 135–6, 166). However, it is rare initially and might have been taken in this position to denote runes, advice, or mysterious knowledge: see Christine Fell, 'Runes and Semantics', in *Old English Runes and their Continental Background*, ed. Alfred Bammesberger, Altenglische Forschungen, 217 (Heidelburg: Winter, 1991), pp. 195–229; R. I. Page, 'Anglo-Saxon Runes and Magic', in *Runes and Runic Inscriptions: Collected Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Viking Runes*, ed. David Parsons (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), pp. 105–25 (updated from *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 27 (1964), 14–31).

43 While transparent enough in synchronic terms, this name-element is rare on the Continent and absent from Scandinavia (where, however, the cognates are etymologically problematic, De Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.vv. *vættr* and the words there cited), and other etymologies have been suggested (Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 39). It seems hard to believe, however, that it was not understood as the word *wiht* in synchronic use (cf. Kitson, 'Anglo-Saxon Personal Names', 118).

44 The place of *wyrm* is problematic because it may have been taken to denote an animal ('maggot, worm, snake'), a supernatural being ('dragon'), and possibly even a one-time man (assuming, through comparison with Norse evidence, that the *wyrm* in *Beowulf* was once the 'last survivor' who speaks in lines 2208–93. The argument was made most forcefully by Raymond P. Tripp Jr, *More about the Fight with the Dragon: 'Beowulf' 2208b–3182, Commentary, Edition and Translation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), but has since regained a degree of favour: see Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), pp. 39–40 and references there). On *wyrm* and its cognates in personal names more generally, see Müller, *Studien*, 64–7, 147–8.

appropriate to anthroponyms. Meanwhile, the commoner animal-names seem to reflect the animals' cultural prestige in early Germanic-speaking cultures.[45] Besides these words, we find *ælf*, *ōs*, *god*, and, if understood in Old English to denote gods, *regen*. This distribution is identical, cognate for cognate, to that of words for supernatural beings in kennings for men in skaldic verse and related evidence discussed in chapter 1: *áss*, *álfr*, *goð* and *regin*. Likewise, the numerous other Old English words for monsters such as *þyrs*, *eoten*, *pūca*, *dweorg* or *mære* are absent from the Anglo-Saxon name-stock, as are their cognates from the kennings. So precise a correlation is impressive, presumably reflecting both similarities in belief and the systemic similarity between dithematic kennings denoting men and lexically meaningful dithematic personal names.[46] The parallel extends to Old Norse dithematic personal names, in which *áss*, *guð* and *regin* are common initial elements (for example, *Ásmundr*, *Guðrún*, *Rǫgnvaldr*), and *álfr* respectably well attested (for example, *Álfhildr*), and from which monster-words are generally excluded.[47]

These considerations suggest the existence of a Germanic naming-system whose protothemes included the etyma of *ælf*, *ōs*, *regen* and *god*, whose mythologically significant collocation in Old Norse poetry is therefore attested for the culture of Common Germanic-speakers. The exclusion of words for monsters from Old English and Norse personal names might not be so old: the German and East Germanic material attests to a scattering of names whose first elements are thought to be cognates of Old Norse *þurs* and maybe *risi* ('giant') and *gýgr* ('ogress, witch').[48] The sparse attestation of these elements hints that this was a dying tradition or the product of sporadic innovation, but they also imply that the exclusion of monster-words from the Old English and Old Norse dithematic name-systems was not inevitable. This encourages the supposition that name-elements reflect the synchronic meanings of their lexical counterparts. Even so, the value of the onomastic evidence for Anglo-Saxon culture is open to question. The fact that *ælf* and *ōs* remained in the naming-system after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons may simply reflect conservatism, as with the retention of *Wealh-* after *wealh* ('foreigner', later 'Welshman, slave') had become pejorative: the social significance of repeating name-elements within a family apparently outweighed the importance of reacting to gradual changes in their lexical meanings.[49] Although new elements were added to the system, such as *Peoht-* ('Pict') and *Trum-* ('strong', a Brittonic loan), and although some seem to have been dropped, such as *-ides* ('lady'), several elements which had been lost from the common lexicon survived throughout the Old English period (for example, *-flǣd*, *Tond-*), presenting a real

45 See Müller, *Studien*, esp. 195–212.

46 On which see Barley, 'Perspectives', 18–24; cf. Schramm, *Namenschatz und Dichtersprache*, 106–19 *et passim*.

47 See Lind, *Norsk-isländska dopnamn*, *passim*.

48 Förstemann, *Altdeutsches Namenbuch*, 1 s.vv. *gug*, *risi*, *thursja*; Kaufmann, *Altdeutsche Personennamen Ergänzungsband*, s.vv. *gug*, *rīsi*, *thursja*.

49 On *Wealh-* see Clark, 'Onomastics', 463–4; Margaret Lindsay Faull, 'The Semantic Development of Old English *Wealh*', *Leeds Studies in English*, 8 (1975), 20–44, esp. 31–2. Cf. the monothematic personal name *Cumbra*.

possibility that the presence of *ælf* in the personal name system merely reflects the semantics of a long-distant time.[50] A further correlative is required.

MORPHOLOGY

Ælf was a long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem. In prehistoric Old English, most long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems, including the monster-words *þyrs* and *wyrm* (shown to have been *i*-stems in proto-Old English by the *i*-mutation of their root vowels), and possibly *ent*, were transferred to the *a*-stem declension, so taking the nominative/accusative plural inflexion *-as*, producing the attested Old English plurals *þyrsas*, *wyrmas* and *entas*.[51] Besides *ælf*, the only long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems to retain the old nominative/accusative plural *-e* were plural names of peoples (for example, *Myrce*, 'Mercians', *Seaxe*, 'Saxons'); the plural denoting 'people', *ælde*; and the suffixes denoting 'dwellers', *-sǣte* and *-ware*.[52] They were joined by loans such as *Beornice* ('Bernicians') and *Ēgypte* ('Egyptians'). Through this re-organisation, the *i*-stem declension appears to have become a declension exclusively for words denoting people or peoples.

The presence of *ælf* in this declension of ethnonyms militates for a semantic association of *ælfe* with humankind. This detail not only parallels the use of *ælf* in anthroponymy, but also my argument that *álfar* and human ethnic others were potentially members of the same early-medieval Scandinavian conceptual category, which I labelled 'otherworldly beings'. This is not the only possible inference: *ælf* may be a member of this declension by metaphorical linking (possibly on the basis of mythology) rather than because it is a prototypical example of a human group.[53] Even so, the possibility even of metaphorical association with words for people and peoples, contrasting with the exclusion of words for monsters from the declension, is strong evidence for *ælf*'s semantics.

This evidence would relate to the period when the morphology of the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems was re-organised – after Old English separated from the Continental West Germanic dialect continuum (since these dialects did not reorganise the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension) and after the onset of *i*-mutation (since words moved out of the declension, like *þyrs*, show *i*-mutation).[54] The situation before the morphological change is barely

50 Andrew Breeze, 'Old English *Trum* "Strong", *Truma* "Host": Welsh *Trwm* "Heavy"', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 40 (1993), 16–19; Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, 15, 37; cf. Insley, 'Pre-Conquest Personal Names', §§3, 4c.a.

51 Richard M. Hogg, 'Phonology and Morphology', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Volume 1: The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. Richard M. Hogg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 67–167, at 131–2; Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §600. On the etymologies see Jente, *Mythologischen Ausdrücke*, 187–9, 134–5, 181–4; cf. F. Holthausen, *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Germanische Bibliothek, 4. Reihe (Wörterbücher), 7 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1934), s.vv. *ent*, *ðyrs*, *wyrm*.

52 Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §610.7; Joseph Wright and Elizabeth Mary Wright, *Old English Grammar*, 3rd edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), §385.

53 Cf. Lakoff, *Dangerous Things*, esp. 91–114.

54 On Continental West Germanic see Wilhelm Braune, *Althochdeutsche Grammatik*, 14th rev.

represented in our texts, if at all, so it must have ended by the time Old English was first being written, around the second half of the seventh century.[55]

It is also of interest that *ælf* seems to have had a familiar partner in the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension: *ōs*. *Ōs* is attested only in the nominative singular (as a name-element, and once as a rune-name which, however, is interpreted as though it were the Latin word meaning 'mouth') and in the genitive plural form *ēsa* in *Wið færstice*. Old Icelandic *áss* is etymologically an athematic stem; if *ōs* was too, then it should not have exhibited the *i*-mutation apparent in the genitive plural form *ēsa* in *Wið færstice*. This form would most obviously be explained by assuming that, in the plural, *ōs* had been moved to the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension. Possibly an *i*-stem variant of *ōs* existed in North-West Germanic; otherwise it is plausible enough that Old English-speakers transferred *ōs* in the plural to the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension because of its assocation with *ælfe* and ethnonyms.[56] If this inference is correct then not only Anglo-Saxon names, but also Old English morphology show an association of *ælf* with *ōs*. There is a textual correlative for this argument, first noted by Grimm, in the fact that *ōs* occurs in *Wið færstice* in alliterative collocation with *ælf*.[57] However, although Harley 585 shows no obvious Scandinavian influence, the case for the influence of Norse vernacular poetry on Old English has enough support that we must take seriously the idea that the formulaic collocation of *ōs* and *ælf* in *Wið færstice* might be borrowed.[58] But the collocation of *ēse* and *ælfe* in *Wið færstice* at least shows the longevity of an association attested in naming-practices inherited from Common Germanic.

The Old English reformation of the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension affords secure evidence that the lexical associations and semantics attested for *ælf* in early Norse poetry and Old English personal names were current in early Old English, and we may be reasonably confident that *ælf* had at this time no less positive connotations than *álfr* did when the relevant skaldic and Eddaic poetry was being composed.

edn by Hans Eggers, Sammlung kurzer Grammatiken germanischer Dialekte, 5 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987), §§214–16; Johan Hendrik Gallée, *Altsächsische Grammatik*, Sammlung kurzer Grammatiken germanischer Dialekte, 6, 2nd edn (Halle: Niemeyer; Leiden: Brill, 1910), §§319–20.

55 Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §601. For the dating of our earliest texts, J. D. Pheifer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Glossaries and the School of Canterbury', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 16 (1987), 17–44.

56 For the *i*-stem argument see Bente Holmberg, 'Asbjørn, Astrid og Åsum: Om den hedenske as som navneled', in *Sakrale navne: Rapport fra NORNAs sekstende symposium i Gilleleje 30.11.–2.12.1990*, ed. Gillian Fellows-Jensen and Bente Holmberg, NORNA-rapporter, 48 (Uppsala: Norna-Förlaget, 1992), pp. 235–49.

57 Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, I 25; cf. II 460.

58 The word *fled* at the end of the charm, if we do not emend, would seem least unlikely to be from Norse, but this is hardly a reliable point (Doane, 'Editing Old English Oral/Written Texts', 144). For Norse influence on Old English poetry see for example Jonathan Watson, 'The *Finnsburh* Skald: Kennings and Cruces in the Anglo-Saxon Fragment', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 101 (2002), 497–51 (with further references at 498 n. 2); Richard Dance, 'North Sea Currents: Old English–Old Norse Relations, Literary and Linguistic', *Literature Compass (Medieval)*, 1 (2003–4), <http://www.blackwell-compass.com/subject/literature/>.

PLACE-NAMES

The evidence of personal names and declension-change also receives some slight support from Old English place-names containing *ælf*.[59] This support can only be of the most fragile kind, because *ælf* is extremely difficult to detect reliably in place-name evidence; *ōs*, indeed, lacks any convincing attestations.[60] The key problem here is that Old English included the monothematic personal names *Ælf* (probably used as an abbreviation of dithematic names in *Ælf-*) and *Ælfa* (probably originally a hypocoristic form of dithematic names in *Ælf-*). Even when an Old English document attests to a place-name which seems to contain *ælf*, then, there is always the possibility that it actually contains a personal name. These problems are compounded by the fact that in later evidence the range of possibilities expands even further: some names which in later texts look like potential *ælf*-names come from later English *elf*, others from dithematic names like *Ælfhēah*, *Ēanwulf* and the Norse *Eilafr*.

Three place-names seem reasonably reliably to contain *ælf*. One is *ælfrucge*, in Kent, occurring in a fifteenth-century copy (unfortunately a poor one) of what seems to be a genuine charter of 996 (S877).[61] Here we probably have *ælf* plus *hrycg* ('ridge'), with some post-Anglo-Saxon interference in the spelling. Crucially, place-names in the south of England whose first element was a personal name usually formed it in the genitive case (which in this case would have been **Ælfes-*) – so **ælfrycg* is reasonably likely to contain the common noun *ælf*. The second name appears in the form *ylfing dene* in Berkshire (putatively '*ælf*-place valley', where *-ing* is a suffix used to form place-names), in a boundary clause of a genuine charter of 956 (S622), attested in twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts.[62] The key evidence here is that *Ælf*-names never otherwise appear in Anglo-Saxon writing in the form *Ylf(-)*. Post-Old English evidence shows that *ylf*-pronunciations of personal names did exist in speech alongside *Ælf*-spellings, so *ylfing* could still have originated as a personal name.[63] But if so, the scribe from whose work our manuscripts derive chose, uniquely, not to write it in the conventional fashion. Finally, Elveden, on lands in Suffolk belonging to the monastery of Bury St Edmunds known as the Liberty of St Edmund, appears in the Domesday Book with the forms *Eluedenā*, *Heluedana*, *Heluedona* and *Haluedona*.[64] These could reflect *ælf* or a personal name, but the anonymous *Miracula sancte Wihtburge*, probably composed in Ely around the mid-twelfth-century, mentions a cleric

[59] For this section see further Hall, 'Are There Any Elves?'.

[60] Margaret Gelling, 'Place-Names and Anglo-Saxon Paganism', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 8 (1962), 7–25, at 18; cf. David Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 5–21, at 21.

[61] Ed. Sean Miller, *Charters of the New Minster, Winchester*, Anglo-Saxon Charters, 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 146.

[62] Ed. S. E. Kelly, *Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters, 7–8, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), II 272.

[63] See Appendices 1 and 2.

[64] Victor Watts (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names Based on the Collections of the English Place-Name Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), s.v. *Elveden*.

'ex rure . . . quodam beatis regis et martyris EDMUNDI quod lingua uallem nunpharum interpretatur anglica' ('from a district pertaining to the blessed king and martyr Edmund, which in the English language is called the valley of the nymphs').[65] This location seems not hitherto to have been identified, but in view of the association of *ælf* with *nympha* in Old English glosses on Latin texts discussed in the next chapter, it is hard to doubt that it is Elveden. Although the *Miracula* might simply reflect the folk-etymologisation of a place-name, it is a clear testimony to the name's twelfth-century synchronic meaning, and does encourage the supposition that we are dealing etymologically with an *ælf*-name.

These names cannot tell us much in themselves. But a wider analysis of other Anglo place-name evidence for non-Christian supernatural beings does show that they are consistent with patterns which are themselves consistent with the arguments above. In the first place, the five or so other medieval place-names which might plausibly derive from *ælf* – even though they might equally derive from other sources – also have second elements which either, like *ælfrucge*, denote hills (Eldon Hill, Derbyshire; *Eluehull*, Cumberland; Elvendon Farm, Oxfordshire), or, like *ylfing dene* and Elveden, end in *-denu* ('main valley'; *helfesdene*, Kent; Alden, Lancashire). If any of these do derive from *ælf*, then they indicate a consistent set of topographical associations. This fits, moreover, with the localisation of *elven* in the Middle English *South English Legendary*, which seems to be a good source for later *elf*-beliefs and is quoted accordingly below.[66] These faint hints as to the topographical associations of *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon place-names are fairly consistent with the associations of place-names containing the personal names of traditional Anglo-Saxon gods. These include two in *-denu* – *Wōdnesdene* (now Hursley Bottom, in Wiltshire) and *Frīgedene* (now Friden, Derbyshire) – while Gelling's recent opinion has rehabilitated the valley Fryup in Yorkshire as a probable candidate for **Frīgehōp* ('Frīge's remote, enclosed place'). Meanwhile Tysoe in Warwickshire is apparently from **Tīwes hōh* ('Tīw's spur') and provides a parallel for *ælfrucge*.[67] How significant this correlation with potential *ælf*-names is is hard to say; god-names are also often associated with *-feld* (in early Old English 'open, unobstructed space') and *-lēah* ('forest, wood, glade, clearing').[68] That what correlations we have are not merely the product of chance, however, is at least suggested by a survey of etymologically English words for supernatural beings securely attested in Old English boundary clauses. These

[65] Ed. Rosalind C. Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely: Goscelin of Saint-Bertin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 211. I owe this reference and the identification of the *uallis nunpharum* to Jeremy Harte, who has kindly allowed me to include it here.

[66] See pp. 140–2.

[67] Gelling, 'Place-Names', 11–12; Margaret Gelling, 'Further Thoughts on Pagan Place-Names', in *Otium et Negotium: Studies in Onomatology and Library Science Presented to Olof von Feilitzen*, ed. Folke Sandgren (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1973), pp. 109–28 (repr. in *Place-Name Evidence for the Anglo-Saxon Invasion and Scandinavian Settlements: Eight Studies*, collected by Kenneth Cameron ([Nottingham]: English Place-Name Society, 1977), pp. 99–114), at 126; Nicholas Brooks, Margaret Gelling and Douglas Johnson, 'A New Charter of King Edgar', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 13 (1984), 137–55 at 150–1; Gelling and Cole, *Landscape*, 137.

[68] Gelling, 'Further Thoughts'; Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, 13–16.

words all denote monstrous beings, and are generally compounded with place-name elements denoting quite different landscape features from those found with *ælfe* and gods' names. Leaving aside the problematic *pucelancyrce* (which resists identification as anything other than 'little goblin's church'; S553), we have *enta(n), scuccan hlǣw* ('hill, burial mound'; S465, 970; S138); *enta dic* ('(waterfilled) ditch, dyke'; S962); *grendles mere* (S416, 579); *grendeles, þyrs pyt* ('(waterfilled) pit'; S255, 222); *pucan wylle* ('pond, lake, pool, wetland'; S106, 508); and *grendeles gate* ('gate'; S1450).[69] The place-names in *-hlǣw* overlap with place-names containing god-names (for example, *Thunoreshlǣw*, Kent), but otherwise it seems clear that monsters are associated with depressions and water features, whereas gods tend to be associated with open land, groves, hills and valleys. Needless to say, a thorough and critical investigation of later evidence for such words in place-names would augment this material. But even if we do not accept the *ælf*-names as reliable evidence, there is sufficient evidence to support the distinction drawn above between *ælfe* and *ēse* on the one hand and monsters on the other in early Anglo-Saxon culture. It also hints that these distinctions were mapped on to the environments in which Anglo-Saxons lived.

Pushing these observations further would be difficult, requiring fuller gathering of data, and much more detailed considerations of precisely what kinds of associations we have here, of how far our tiny datasets are comparable, and of what biases they may contain. The material does advert, however, to the final source to be considered in this chapter: *Beowulf*. Although my comparison here of place-names containing words for gods and words for monsters is new, the correlation between *Beowulf*'s portrayal of Grendel's *mere* and the toponymic associations of monsters has long been noted.[70] *Beowulf* provides a vital literary insight into Anglo-Saxon constructions of space, and, moreover, one which explicitly involves *ælfe*.

INTERPRETATIONS, AND *BEOWULF*

Combining the evidence of Old English morphology and personal names, and the earliest Old Norse evidence, we find a fundamentally consistent set of associations for *ælf* and *álfr*: a lexical collocation with *ōs/áss* (and to a lesser extent *god/goð* and *regen/regin*), suggesting that the words denoted significantly similar beings; a more general association with the denotation of people and peoples, which suggests that *ælfe/álfar* and *ēse/æsir* were like humans in some crucial respect(s); and a semantic contradistinction to the words denoting monsters which aligns *ælfe/álfar, ēse/æsir* and humans in a systematic opposition to monsters. Place-name evidence also supports the idea of a strong distinction between gods and monsters in Anglo-Saxon

[69] Translations based on Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape*, *passim*.

[70] For example, Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of 'Beowulf'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 80–2.

world-views. This system seems likely to have existed in the common ancestors of Old English and Norse, so we must infer that Anglo-Saxons brought it with them when they migrated to Britain. At any rate, it was certainly current in Scandinavia in a formative period of poetic language around the ninth century, and in Anglo-Saxon England in a morphologically formative period around the sixth. The Old English material adduced so far is neatly susceptible to the same componential analysis as I have applied to the Norse material, though the validity of the precise features used is so far justified largely by comparison with Norse:

	ælde	*ēse*	*ælfe*	*þyrsas*, *entas*
SUPERNATURAL	−	+	+	+
MONSTROUS	−	−	−	+

Figure 4. Componential analysis of Old English words for beings

This can again be expressed as a semantic field diagram (Figure 5).

One corollary of this, consolidated by textual evidence considered below, is that it is unlikely that *ælfe* in early Old English were considered particularly

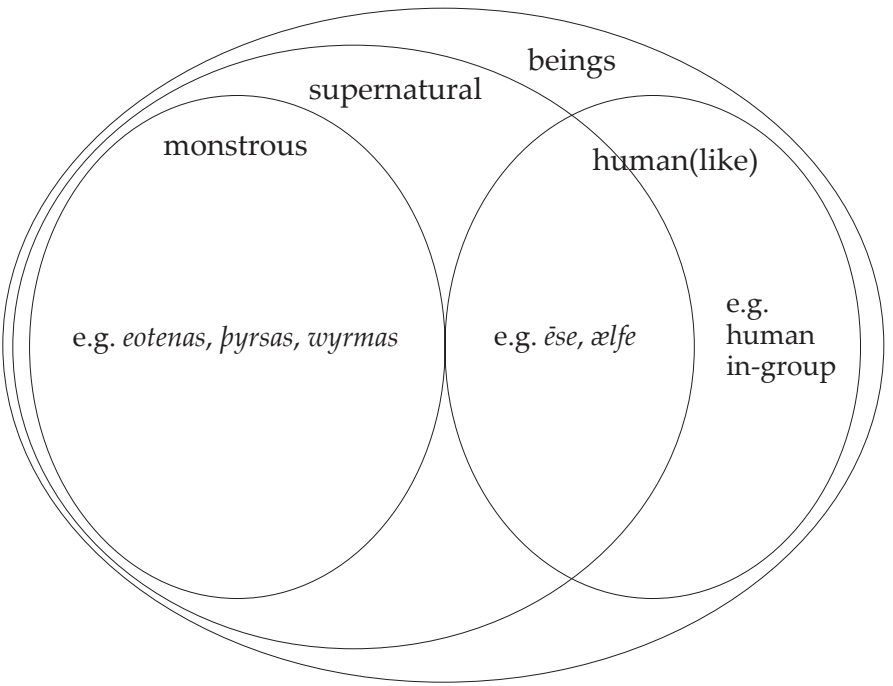

Figure 5. Semantic field diagram of Old English words for beings

small, invisible or incorporeal.[71] Although it is not conclusive, the early Old English evidence suggests corporeal anthropomorphic beings mirroring the human in-groups which believed in them. This prospect is eminently well paralleled in medieval north-west Europe by the evidence for *álfar*, the medieval Irish *aes síde*, the inhabitants of the medieval Welsh Annwn, medieval Latin *fatae* and Old French *fées*, Middle English *elves*, and the Older Scots *elvis*.[72]

A more profound corollary is that *ælfe* should be seen as components in early Anglo-Saxon discourses of group identity. Identities in the post-Roman world have enjoyed much recent attention, but the evidence presented here affords some unique new perspectives.[73] Likewise, the study of monsters in medieval thought, and their relationships with identity, is now well established, but this research has been largely limited to written intellectual traditions whose significance for the less learned sections of early-medieval society, and especially for pre-conversion society, is questionable.[74] The present study, however, provides a viable set of non-literary, early evidence. Additionally, models of early-medieval constructions of group identities are generally predicated on processes of inclusion: groups, in these models, are

71 For smallness see for example Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, II 449–51; Jolly 'Elves in the Psalms?', 19–26; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 47; Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 236, 253; for invisibility Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 134; 'Elves in the Psalms?', 20; for incorporeality Heather Stuart, 'The Meaning of Old English **ælfsciene*', *Parergon*, 2 (1972), 22–6, at 22; pp. 6–7 above.

72 See chapter 5 below. On Wales see in addition Juliette Wood, 'The Fairy Bride Legend in Wales', *Folklore* 103 (1992), 56–72; on Scandinavia chapter 1 n. 1; on French Lucy Allen Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, 2nd edn by Roger Sherman Loomis, Burt Franklin Bibliographical Series, 18 (New York: Franklin, 1960); Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine; la naissance des fées*, Nouvelle bibliothèque du Moyen Âge, 8 (Paris: Champion, 1984); Pierre Gallais, *La fée à la fontaine et à l'arbre: une archetype du conte merveilleux et du récit courtois*, CERMEIL, 1 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992); Christine Ferlampin-Acher, *Fées, bestes et luitons: croyances et merveilles dans les romans français en prose (XIIIe–XIVe siècles)* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002), 121–69; on Scotland Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*.

73 For prominent examples see the articles in John Hines (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, Studies in Archaeoethnology, 2 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997); in William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrrell (ed.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000); in Andrew Gillet (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Emergence of English Identity, 700–1000', in *Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 24–52; Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); cf. more generally the articles in other volumes in the series *Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology* and *The Transformation of the Roman World* published respectively by Brewer in Cambridge and Brill in Leiden.

74 For example, David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, Medieval Cultures, 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999); John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 1st Syracuse University Press edn (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000). On Anglo-Saxon England see especially Greta Austin, 'Marvelous Peoples or Marvelous Races? Race and the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East*', in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, ed. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger, Studies in Medieval Culture, 42 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), pp. 25–51; Joyce Tally Lionarons, 'From Monster to Martyr: The Old English Legend of Saint Christopher', in *ibid.*, 167–82; Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*.

formed through individuals' shared characteristics. In earlier scholarship, ancestry and language were emphasised; more recently, material culture and shared origin-myths have gained prominence. But my evidence suggests another model, of identity based on exclusivity: individuals were members of a given group because they were not from outside it, in specific and historically traceable ways.

Developing this observation demands a wider investigation of the roles of belief in constructing group identity than is possible here, though in some respects I return to it in my analysis of *ælfe* and gendering in chapter 6 below. However, we do have one Anglo-Saxon text which explicitly situates *ælfe* in a wider discourse on the relationships between men and monsters in the world: *Beowulf*. Moreover, this source is probably relatively early, dating from the eighth or ninth centuries.[75] As Neville has emphasised regarding Old English poetry, Anglo-Saxon literature offers little in the way of explicit cosmography; what there is is directly based on Christian theology.[76] *Beowulf*, however, is rich in implicit cosmology, which corroborates, elaborates and complicates my lexically based reconstruction of the relationships between men and monsters in sixth-century Anglo-Saxon culture.

There is one (certain) attestation of *ælf* in *Beowulf*, in the explanation of the origins of Grendel in lines 102–14, at the end of fitt I:

> wæs se grimma gǣst grendel hāten
> mǣre mēarcstapa sē þe mōras hēold
> fen ond fæsten fīfelcynnes eard
> wonsǣli wer weardode hwīle
> siþðan him scyppend forscrifen hæfde
> in cāines cynne þone cwealm gewræc
> ēce drihten þæs þe hē ābel slōg ·
> Ne gefeah hē þǣre fæhðe ac hē hine feorwræc
> metod for þȳ māne mancynne fram
> þanon untȳdras ealle onwōcon
> eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas
> swylce gīgantas þā wið gode wunnon
> lange þrāge hē him ðæs lēan forgeald .[77]

[75] Fulk, *A History*, esp. 153–68, 381–92. Although Fulk underrated the possibility of linguistically conservative registers of Old English, his linguistic evidence makes later dating unlikely (cf. B. R. Hutcheson, 'Kaluza's Law, the Dating of *Beowulf*, and the Old English Poetic Tradition', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 103 (2004), 297–322). For the dating debate see further R. E. Bjork. and A. Obermeier, 'Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences', in *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), pp. 13–34; Michael Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 29 (2000), 5–41, and the response of E. G. Stanley, 'Paleographical and Textual Deep Waters: <a> for <u> and <u> for <a>, <d> for <ð> and <ð> for <d> in Old English', *ANQ* 15 (2002), 64–72; Kevin S. Kiernan, '*Beowulf* and the '*Beowulf* Manuscript', 2nd edn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) and the partial response of R. D. Fulk, 'On Argumentation in Old English Philology, with Particular Reference to the Editing and Dating of *Beowulf*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2004), 1–26.

[76] *Representations*, 144–63.

[77] Ed. Fr. Klaeber, *Beowulf*, 3rd edn (Boston: Heath, 1950), 5; collated with Kemp Malone (ed.), *The Nowell Codex: British Museum Cotton Vitellius A. XV, Second MS*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, 12 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1963), f. 132. A case can be made for an attestation in line 1314, where the manuscript form *alfwalda* has hitherto been emended to *(e)alwalda* ('all-ruler'; see Birte Kelly, 'The Formative Stages of *Beowulf* Textual Scholarship:

> That fierce spirit/guest was called Grendel, the famed border-walker, he who occupied waste-lands, the fen and the fastness, the homeland of the giant-race – the ill-blessed man inhabited them for a time, after the Creator had condemned him; the eternal Lord avenged that killing on the kin of Cain, because he [Cain] slew Abel. He did not profit from that feud, but the Measurer banished him for that crime, from humankind. Thence all misbegotten beings spang forth, *eotenas* and *ælfe* and *orcneas*, likewise *gīgantas*, which struggled against God for a long while. He gave them repayment for that.

This passage presents a binary opposition between men and monsters like that between Mannheimar and Jǫtunheimar in early-medieval Scandinavia. Grendel is emphatically from beyond the in-group of the Danes (and human society generally): he has kin but no lineage; he is associated with Cain's transgression of core social customs of reparation (cf. lines 134–7, 154–8); and is from a place apart from the in-group's (cf. esp. lines 1345–79).[78] Grendel's depredations, unlike Óðinn's in *Grímnismál* or Vǫlundr's in *Vǫlundarkviða*, seem not to be provoked by a misdeed on the part of his victims (unless indirectly as a divine response to the Danes' pride), and they are directed not at an individual, but at society as a whole.[79] Because Old English *hām* did not undergo the semantic extension of Old Norse *heimr* from the older meaning 'settlement (?and hinterland)' to 'world', Norse compounds like *Jǫtunheimar*

Part II', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 12 (1983), 239–75, at 245). P. B. Taylor and P. H. Salus, 'Old English *Alf Walda*', *Neophilologus*, 66 (1982), 440–2, noted that the manuscript's 'hwæþre him alfwalda' might be an *ælf*-compound. Their argument is unacceptable as it stands (and improved neither by Raymond P. Tripp, 'Beowulf 1314a: The Hero as *Alfwalda*, "Ruler of Elves"', *Neophilologus*, 70 (1986), 630–2, nor Paul Beekman Taylor, *Sharing Story: Medieval Norse–English Literary Relationships*, AMS Studies in the Middle Ages, 25 (New York: AMS Press, 1998), pp. 99–106). But *alfwalda* could be an old compound showing the failure of *i*-mutation (see Hogg, *A Grammar*, §5.85.11), and the reading has its merits in the poetic context. Hrothgar waits to see whether the *al(f)walda* will assist him at a point in the poem where he is conspicuously short of hope, his earlier invocations of the *alwalda* drying up (see Edward B. Irving, Jr, 'The Nature of Christianity in *Beowulf*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 13 (1984), 7–21, esp. 14–15; for further and incisive criticisms of Hrothgar see Scott DeGregorio, 'Theorizing Irony in *Beowulf*: The Case of Hrothgar', *Exemplaria*, 11 (1999), 309–43). The Danes have already shown a propensity to turn to the Devil in times of distress (cf. lines 175–88): in line 1314, too, Hrothgar may be turning to the *alfwalda*, understood by *Beowulf*'s audience as a synonym for the Devil. But this argument remains speculative, and draws on the evidence of this study more than it provides additional evidence for it.

78 On lineage see E. G. Stanley, '"A Very Land-fish, Languageless, a Monster": Grendel and the Like in Old English', in *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe*, ed. K. E. Olsen and L. A. R. J. Houwen, Mediaevalia Groningana, n.s. 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 79–92, at 79–82. Charles Donahue, 'Grendel and the *Clanna Cain*', *Journal of Celtic Studies*, 1 (1950), 167–75, and James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), 102–14, have both suggested that *Beowulf* lines 111–13 were based on two related passages from the Irish tract *Sex aetates mundi*, apparently a translation from a Latin text, first attested in the eleventh-century manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B. 502. If this were correct, then Irish counterparts for the *untȳdras* in *Beowulf* could be identified (the likely counterpart to *ælfe* being *luchorpain*). However, Carney, *Studies*, 106–14, saw the inspiration for the Irish passage in Isidore's *Etymologiae* (XI.iii, *De portentis*) and, as Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 71, implied, this could be taken as the direct inspiration for both *Sex aetates mundi* and *Beowulf*. No secure conclusions can be drawn from these comparisons.

79 The Danes' pride was argued for, for example, by Margaret E. Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of 'Beowulf'* (London: Athlone, 1970), 83–96.

and *Álfheimar* have no Old English cognates.[80] But the closest Old English counterpart to *heimr* seems to be *eard* ('habitation, habitat, region, land, etc.'); it is fitting, therefore, that Grendel's territory is in *fīfelcynnes eard* ('the dominion of the (water-)monster-race') and that his *mere* is later described as *ælwihta eard* ('the dominion of ?alien beings', line 1500) – terms which seem likely to have contrasted with Old English *middaneard* ('middle dominion') in the same way as *Jǫtunheimar* contrasted with *Mannheimar*.[81] Appropriately enough in view of these correlations, *Beowulf*'s list of the *untȳdras* ('misbegotten beings') of *Caines cynn* ('the kin of Cain') with which Grendel is aligned also includes the Old English cognate of *jǫtnar, eotenas*. This much, then, fits with the binary contrast between men and monsters posited above, and supports its validity regarding Anglo-Saxon culture.

However, *Beowulf* includes *ælfe* among the *untȳdras*, and its usage here is diametrically contrary to the early Old Norse and Old English alignment of *álfar~ælfe* with the human in-group against the monsters. Nor is it unique in early Old English. The evidence of our Anglo-Saxon medical texts for the demonisation of *ælfe* is, I argue in chapters 5 and 6, more ambivalent than was previously thought. But besides wider comparisons, such as the Middle Dutch development of a general diabolical denotation for *alf*, an early diabolical meaning for *ælf* is attested in BL Royal 2 A. XX, which seems to have been made in the last quarter of the eighth century or perhaps the first quarter of the ninth in West Mercia, probably in or near Worcester, and known as the Royal Prayerbook.[82] It is one of four early Anglo-Saxon prayerbooks, each with some textual interrelationships, containing mainly Latin prayers; its general theme 'would appear to be Christ as the healer of mankind', and its concern with physical healing is sufficient to suggest that it 'might have functioned as a devotional, and practical, tool for a physician'.[83] *Ælf* occurs here on folio 45v, in a unique *oratio* which invokes the power of the cross to guard the body 'ab omnibus insidiis inimici' ('against all the wiles of the Enemy'). The prayer proceeds to a Greek liturgical passage and concludes with an exorcism

[80] Cf. John Hines, 'At Home in the Viking Period', in *Land, Sea and Home*, ed. John Hines, Alan Lane and Mark Redknap, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monography, 20 (Leeds: Maney, 2004), pp. 1–5, at 1–2; Stefan Brink, 'Home: The Term and the Concept from a Linguistic and Settlement-Historical Viewpoint', in *The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings, and Environments*, ed. David N. Benjamin (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995), pp. 17–24.

[81] Ed. Klaeber, *Beowulf*, 56; Cf. Roberts, Kay and Grundy, *Thesaurus*, §01.01.02 *A dwelling-place, abode, habitation*.

[82] E. Verdam, J. Verwijs and F. A. Stoett, *Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek*, 11 vols ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1885–1941), s.v. *alf*. On the Royal Prayerbook's date see Joseph Crowley, 'Anglicized Word Order in Old English Continuous Interlinear Glosses in British Library, Royal 2. A. XX', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 29 (2000), 123–51, at 123 n. 2; cf. Ker, *Catalogue*, 317–18 [no. 248]; on place Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England 600–800*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 279–80; cf. Michelle P. Brown, 'Female Book-Ownership and Production in Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence of the Ninth-Century Prayerbooks', in *Lexis and Texts in Early English: Studies Presented to Jane Roberts*, ed. Christian Kay and Louise M. Sylvester, Costerus New Series, 133 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 45–67, at 51–3.

[83] Brown, 'Female Book-Ownership', 56, 57; cf. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 275–327; for contents see Doane, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 52–9 [no. 283].

including the statement 'adiuro te satanae diabulus aelfae . per d*eu*m uiuum ac uerum · et per trementem diem iudicii ut refugiatur ab homine illo . . .' ('I conjure you, devil of Satan, of (an/the) *ælf*, through the living and true God and through the quaking day of judgement, that he is put to flight from that person . . .').[84] Here, then, we have the word *aelfae* which, in the absence of any likely Latin, Greek or Hebrew identification, must be a Latinised form of *ælf*. *Aelfae* is integral to the text and unrelated to the tenth-century Old English glosses in the manuscript. *Diabolus* here is surely a vocative, and *satanae* a genitive. But it is not immediately clear whether *aelfae* is intended as a common noun in apposition to *Satanae* ('I conjure you, devil of Satan, of an *ælf*'), or whether it is a vernacular synonym for *Satanae* ('I conjure you, devil of the *ælf* Satan'). If the former translation is best, the ending of *aelfae* would most naturally be identified as a regular first-declension feminine genitive-singular inflexion, in which case we might infer that it was intended to denote a female being – as in the fifteenth-century Anglo-Latin prayer against *Elfae* from which I quote below.[85] This interpretation would imply that not only Satan, but *ælfe*, were conceived to rule over *diaboli*. But this does not seem very likely, so *aelfae* was more probably intended as a synonym for *Satanae*; the genitive ending *-ae* in this interpretation was modelled on that of the irregular noun *Satanas*, so not implying that *ælfe* were female – on the contrary, the synonymy with *Satanas* would imply that they were male. Either way, the Royal Prayerbook attests to the early association of *ælf* with Christian demonic beings, and probably its use specifically of Satan himself. It is hard to guess when the prayer took its present form – it could be as late as the manuscript itself.[86]

Despite *Beowulf*'s many traditional traits, however, I do not think that these texts suggest the oft-posited Germanic tradition of 'ambiguous' or 'amoral' *ælfe*.[87] *Beowulf* lines 102–14 present a subtle conflation of biblical, apocryphal

[84] Ed. A. B. Kuypers, *The Prayer Book of Aedeluald the Bishop, Commonly Called the Book of Cerne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 221; collated with Doane, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 283.

[85] See p. 122.

[86] As David Howlett, 'Hellenic Learning in Insular Latin: An Essay on Supported Claims', *Peritia*, 12 (1998), 54–78, at 60, argued, the Greek transliteration shows knowledge of the contemporary values of Greek letters (cf. p. 65); it would share this with the Canterbury biblical commentaries deriving from the teaching of Theodore and Hadrian in the seventh century analysed in Michael Lapidge, 'The Study of Greek at the School of Canterbury in the Seventh Century', in *Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 123–39 (first publ. *The Sacred Nectar of the Greeks: The Study of Greek in the West in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Michael Herren (London: King's College London, 1988), 169–94), at 130–3, and Lapidge seems to have considered some connection between the prayer and Theodore reasonably likely: 'The School of Theodore and Hadrian', in *Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 141–68 (first publ. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 15 (1986), 45–72), at 145 n. 29. The spelling <ae> for later <æ> in *aelf-* is unusual for the late eighth century but not impossibly so: Hogg, *A Grammar*, §2.12 n. 1.

[87] For example, Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 231; Motz, 'Of Elves and Dwarves', esp. 101–2; Stuart, 'The Anglo-Saxon Elf', 316; Simek, *Dictionary*, s.vv. *elves*, *dark elves*, *light elves*; cf. Jens Peter Schjødt, 'Relationen mellem aser og vaner og dens ideologiske implikationer', in *Nordisk hedendom: Et symposium*, ed. G. Steinsland *et al.* ([Odense]: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1991), pp. 303–19, at 306 for a more sophisticated variation on the theme which, however, I find no more convincing.

and patristic explanations for the origins of monsters.[88] At a lexical level, it connects words of vernacular origin (*eotenas* and *ælfe*) with words which are, and probably were, obviously loans: *orcneas* (< Latin *Orcus* '(god of the) underworld') and, if the reading is correct – we owe the word to Thorkelin's transcripts – *gīgantas* (< Latin *gigas* 'giant' < Greek *γίγας*).[89] While *Beowulf* line 112 may, then, attest to an established tradition of monstrous *ælfe*, there is no constraint upon us to assume so – and less again in the context of the Royal Prayerbook. Other Old English evidence, alongside later English and Scots material, emphasises that *ælf* never underwent as successful a pejoration as its Continental West Germanic cognates. *Beowulf*'s situation of *ælfe* in alliterative and semantic collocation with *eotenas* can be read rather as a self-conscious (and perhaps ostentatious) realignment of the *ælfe*, demonising them by association with monsters traditional (*eotenas*), Classical (*orcneas*) and biblical (*gīgantas*).[90] Nor was it done on a whim: *Beowulf* is, as Tolkien argued, predicated on a vision of the heathen past as a hopeless struggle against a diabolically dominated world.[91] For its portrayal to work, it was necessary to rule out the traditional idea that humans might have had non-Christian supernatural support in their struggle.

It is evident that it did not take long for *ælfe* to be demonised in some traditions. The early evidence for this in *Beowulf* and the Royal Prayerbook may be compared with the later-eighth-century Old Saxon Catechism, whose language suggests 'an Anglo-Saxon imperfectly acquainted with OS adapting a presumably OE text as best he could for OS addressees': 'end ec forsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum, Thunaer ende Uuôden ende Saxnôte ende allum them unholdum the hira genôtas sint' ('and I renounce all the Devil's deeds and words, Thunaer and UUôden and Saxnôt and all those evil beings which are their companions').[92] With themes like these in early catechisms, it is no surprise that *ælfe* should have been aligned with the Devil. However, the implication here that conversion had swift and substantial effects on beliefs in *ælfe* comes with caveats. The first is that such catechisms – even where heard, understood and remembered – may not have prompted any paradigm shift in those catechised. Evidence for traditional Scandinavian beliefs suggests that an individual might seek the patronage of one god, and both criticise other gods and face their displeasure; transferring the concept to Anglo-Saxon culture, John inferred that 'the nearest parallel to Woden in the modern world would be a Premier League football manager'.[93] The Old

88 See Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 58–85.

89 Cf. Holthausen, *Wörterbuch*, s.vv. *orc*, *gīgant*.

90 As so often, *Beowulf* finds a neat parallel in *Grettis saga*, in Hallmundr's inclusion of 'álfa kind' in his poetic list of the monsters he has slain (ch. 62; ed. Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar; Bandamanna saga*, Íslenzk fornrit, 7 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritfélag, 1936), 204).

91 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 5–48 (first publ. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 22 (1936), 245–95).

92 Ed. Wilhelm Braune, *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, 15th edn by Ernst A. Ebbinghaus (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969), 39; quotation from Green, *Language and History*, 345.

93 Richard North, 'Goð Geyja: The Limits of Humour in Old Norse-Icelandic Paganism', *Quaestio:*

Saxon Catechism can be understood in the same way: the catechised transfers his allegiance to one god (admittedly Trinitarian in form) and denigrates the others (whose existence is not denied). These observations provide some context for the evidence to be considered below that the demonisation of *ælfe* was an extremely slow process.

CONCLUSIONS

It has proved possible reliably to reconstruct the earliest conceptual associations between humans, *ælfe* and monsters. Our earliest Old English evidence matches our early Scandinavian evidence neatly, providing good evidence for a tripartite conceptual system in which members of the in-group were aligned on the one hand with *ælfe* and pagan gods, against monsters on the other. *Ælfe* and monsters can be situated in early Anglo-Saxon world-views as important components in constructing group identity by exclusive means at a critical stage of the development of English ethnicity. These findings also provide us with a new opportunity to check on *Beowulf*'s conservatism, and to investigate how the meanings of *ælf* could develop under the early pressures of Christianisation. *Beowulf* incorporates Romano-Christian materials into an existing binary paradigm dividing humans and monsters, but is innovative in situating the *ælfe* on the monsters' side of the arrangement. The tension between these perspectives will be apparent throughout the evidence presented in the following chapters of this book, but the continuation of the more traditional, more positive view of *ælfe* can readily be perceived. The first kind of evidence pointing in this direction relates to material linking *ælfe* with females and feminine traits.

Selected Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 1 (2000), 1–22; also published in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference, 2–7 July 2000, University of Sydney*, ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney 2000), pp. 386–95, accessed from <http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/medieval/saga.html>, 20 May 2006. Eric John, *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 23.

3

Female Elves and Beautiful Elves

IF asked to survey medieval English elves, scholars might reasonably look first to the Wife of Bath's 'elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye' who 'Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede', or to Sir Thopas's decision that 'An elf queene shal my lemman be . . . An elf queene wol I loue, ywys'.[1] They would find a precedent for Chaucer's beautiful female *elves* in the early fourteenth century, in the description in the *Fasciculus morum* of 'reginas pulcherrimas et alias puellas tripudiantes cum domina Dyana, choreas ducentes dea paganorum, que in nostro vulgari dicitur *elves*' ('very beautiful queens and other girls dancing with their mistress Dyana, leading dances with the goddess of the pagans, who in our vernacular are called *elves*'); around 1300 in our earliest attestation of *elf-ring*, 'a ring of daisies caused by elves' dancing'; and in the late thirteenth century in the *South English Legendary*, which descibes angels who neither fought for nor against God and were banished to the earth:

> ofte in forme of womman ·
> in mony deorne weie
> Me siþ of hom gret companie ·
> boþe hoppe & pleie
> Þat eleuene beoþ icluped .[2]
>
> often in the form of woman
> on many a hidden path
> men see a great company of them
> both dance and play,
> that are called *eluene* [following other MSS]

Parallels in Latin lead back into the twelfth century, along with Laȝamon's characterisation of the queen Argante as 'aluen swiðe sceone' ('a very beautiful

1 Ed. Larry D. Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 116, 214.

2 Respectively, ed. and trans. Siegfried Wenzel, *Fasciculus morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 578; T. Hunt, *Plant Names of Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), 87 (s.v. *elferingewort*); ed. C. d'Evelyn and A. J. Mill, *The South English Legendary*, Early English Text Society, 235, 236, 244, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1956–9), II 409; cf. Carl Horstmann (ed.), *The Early South-English Legendary or Lives of Saints I: MS. Laud, 108, in the Bodleian Library*, Early English Text Society, 87 (London: Trübner, 1887), 306–7, and lines 2749–54 of Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, ed. William Aldis Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, 2 vols, Rolls Series, 86 (London: HMSO, 1887), 196. For Robert's use of the *Legendary* see Manfred Görlach, *Studies in Middle English Saints' Legends*, Anglistische Forschungen, 257 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1998), 48–55; O. S. Pickering, '*South English Legendary* Style in Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*', *Medium Ævum*, 70 (2001), 1–18.

alue') and 'fairest alre aluen' ('the most beautiful of all *aluen*'); and they run on into the early-modern period when, for example, Milton wrote of

> . . . Faery Elves,
> Whose midnight Revels, by a Forest side
> Or Fountain some belated Peasant sees,
> Or dreams he sees, while overhead the Moon
> Sits Arbitress, and nearer to the Earth
> Wheels her pale course, they on their mirth and dance
> Intent, with jocund Music charm his ear. . .[3]

Nor need we take these descriptions merely as literary fantasies: at any rate, in 1598 an Aberdeenshire healer, Andro Man, was executed for, amongst other things, confessing to encounters with 'the Quene of Elphen'.[4]

However, it has been traditional to characterise such ideas of *elves* as the product of post-Conquest 'Celtic' literary influence, directly on Old French and Anglo-Norman literature and, indirectly through this, on English.[5] These seductive female *elves* are implicitly contrasted in this view with an Anglo-Saxon (or 'Germanic') tradition of mischievous or demonic sprite-like *ælfe*. I have shown already that early *ælfe* were probably human-like, providing a basis for reading more continuity between earlier- and later-medieval English beliefs. What this chapter tackles is a body of evidence, most of it chronologically intermediary between the early evidence discussed in the previous chapter and the medical manuscripts discussed in the next two, which relates to this issue, and particularly to *ælfe*'s gender. Our early Scandinavian evidence attests only to male *álfar* – albeit, in Vǫlundr's case, *álfar* of dubitable masculinity. Can we then indeed attribute beautiful female *elves* to post-Conquest cultural developments? Or can we project them back into early belief? Or does their later presence reflect change during the Anglo-Saxon period? I argue for the latter, these considerations underpinning my discussion of Anglo-Saxon gendering in chapter 6.

Two kinds of evidence are considered here. One is the poetic Old English word *ælfscȳne*, literally '*ælf*-beautiful'. I start, however, by analysing two textual traditions of Old English glosses which use *ælf* as the basis for glossing Latin words for nymphs, the beautiful supernatural females of Classical

[3] Ed. Brook and Leslie, *Laȝamon*, II 750 (lines 14277, 14291); *Paradise Lost* I.781–7, ed. Christopher Ricks, *John Milton: Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin, 1989), 27. Cf. Walter Map's *De nugis curialium* (ii.11–12, iv.8, iv.10), ed. and trans. M. R. James, *Walter Map: De nugis curialium. Courtiers' Trifles*, rev. by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors, Anecdota Oxoniensa, 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 148, 154, 345, 349; Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (3.3.6), ed. J. Olrik and H. Ræder, *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, 2 vols (Hauniæ: Levin & Munksgaard, 1931–57), I 69.

[4] Ed. John Stuart, *The Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, Spalding Club Publications, 3, 6, 16, 20, 24, 5 vols (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1841–52), I 119; cf. Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 133–9. Similar ideas were invoked against Joan of Arc in 1431: Karen Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, Medieval Cultures, 20 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 1–20.

[5] For example, Philippson, *Germanisches Heidentum*, 78; Carolyne Larrington, 'The Fairy Mistress in Medieval Literary Fantasy', in *Writing and Fantasy*, ed. Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 32–47, esp. 35–6; cf. Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, 47–9; P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Satan's Conspiracy: Magic and Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2001), 10–17, esp. 15–16, *et passim*.

mythologies. Using gloss-evidence is especially tricky, and glosses have often been poorly handled in the past. It is, therefore, worth spelling out some methodological desiderata for their deployment:

1. Although glosses were intended as equivalents to their lemmata, this does not mean that the reverse is true: inversions like '*Wælcyrge* is . . . glossed with Bellona' are misguided and misleading.[6] Nor do glosses generally attempt to 'define' their lemmata: they gloss them.[7]
2. The meaning of a gloss is not the only variable, since the glossator's interpretation of the lemma cannot be taken for granted. A lemma's source must be discovered, so that its original contextual meaning can be inferred. Fortunately, most sources have now been traced; but glossators and their copyists also mis- or reinterpreted lemmata.
3. The provenance and textual history of glosses must be established. This is especially difficult with glosses and glossaries, which redactors could freely excerpt, conflate or re-order, but no less important than usual: copies of a text must not be mistaken for independent evidence. Of course, where a redactor maintained a gloss while revising his exemplar(s), he may affirm its continued validity, but corrupt and meaningless glosses were repeated too often for us to assume this as a rule.
4. The occurrences of *ælf* in the glossaries are often in nonce-compounds, coined specifically as gloss-words, and may relate only indirectly to *ælf*'s everyday use. Such gloss-words afford quite different evidence from those reflecting everyday usage, and must as far as possible be identified.
5. Finally, one must also ask which Old English words glossators chose *not* to use to gloss a given lemma, and why. A gloss chosen out of desperation for an even vaguely appropriate vernacular term offers very different evidence from one selected as the ideal choice from a range of possibilities. Even with the *Thesaurus of Old English*, spotting absences in this way is extremely difficult. Fortunately, the material considered here affords unusual leverage on the problem.

Of the two gloss-traditions considered here, one certainly derives from the eighth century if not before, and combines the basic root *ælf* with a feminising suffix *-en* (earlier *-inn* < **-injō*), used to form feminine derivatives from masculine nouns, to make the word *ælfen*.[8] The other may also be eighth-century but could be later. It too uses *ælf*, but feminises it by transferring it to the feminine *ō*-stem declension, with the plural form *ælfa*. Crucially, the

6 Price, *The Viking Way*, 345–6 at 346; cf. Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 44; Katherine Morris, *Sorceress or Witch? The Image of Gender in Medieval Iceland and Northern Europe* (New York: Lanham, 1991), 25; following note.

7 *Contra* Nicholas K. Kiessling, 'Grendel: A New Aspect', *Modern Philology*, 65 (1968), 191–201, at 194; Neville, *Representations*, 105, 106.

8 See especially Bogislav von Lindheim, 'Die weiblichen Genussuffixe im Altenglischen', *Anglia*, 76 (1958), 479–504, at 480–3; also Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §592c; Hans Krahe and Wolfgang Meid, *Germanische Sprachwissenschaft*, Sammlung Göschen, 238, 238a, 238b, 780, 1218, 1218a, 1218b, 7th edn by Wolfgang Meid, 3 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), III §101.1; Voyles, *Grammar*, §7.2.26.

two traditions were later conflated in the eleventh-century Antwerp–London Glossary, the morphological developments attested there providing major insights into the changing meanings of *ælf*.

THE *ÆLFEN* GLOSSES

The first of the two sets of Old English glosses which I examine uses the word *ælfen*. The lemmata of these glosses derive from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*:

> Nymphas deas aquarum putant, dictas a nubibus. Nam ex nubibus aquae, unde derivatum est. Nymphas deas aquarum, quasi numina lympharum. Ipsas autem dicunt et Musas quas et nymphas, nec inmerito. Nam atque motus musicen efficit. Nympharum apud gentiles varia sunt vocabula. Nymphas quippe montium Oreades dicunt, silvarum Dryades, fontium Hamadryades, camporum Naides, maris Nereides [naides *BCT*].[9]
>
> They reckon *nymphae* to be goddesses of waters, so called from clouds [*nubes*, but cf. *nimbus* 'storm(cloud)']. For waters [come] from clouds, whence [*nympha*] is derived. [They reckon] *nymphae* goddesses of waters, just like the spirits of water. But those who are *nymphae* they also call *Musae*, not without cause. For, in addition, [their] movements create music. There are varied terms for *nymphae* among pagans: for they call *nymphae* of mountains *Oreades*, of woods *Dryades*, of springs *Hamadryades*, of plains *Naides* and of the sea *Nereids* [*naides BCT*].

The earliest and most conservative manuscript of the glosses to this text is in Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit Voccius Lat. 4° 106, being a Continental manuscript of twenty-five leaves whose two main hands (in one of which the glosses are written) are agreed to be 'not later than the first half of the ninth century'.[10] The manuscript seems certainly to have been at Fleury in the tenth century, and was likely enough produced there.[11] The *ælfen* glosses occur together in a blank space on folio 10r which follows a text of the Latin riddles attributed to Symphosius (ff. 2v–8v) and the contents list (ff. 9r–10r) of Aldhelm's enigmata (themselves covering ff. 10v–25v):

Nimphae . aelfinni eadem . & muse	*Nymphae*: *ælfenne*, and at the same time *musae*;
Oreades dūun . aelfinni .	*Oreades*: mountain-*ælfenne*;

[9] Ed. W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi: Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), I 8.11.96–7.

[10] M. B. Parkes, 'The Manuscript of the Leiden Riddle', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1 (1972), 207–17, at 215; cf. Ker, *Catalogue*, 479 [appendix, no. 19]. Additionally, Laurence Nowell's *Vocabularium Saxonicum* of 1565 contains the entry 'bergælfen' ('hill-*ælfen*'; cited by Peters, 'OE *ælf*', 255; cf. William Somner, *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum*, English Linguistics 1500–1800 (a Collection of Facsimile Reprints), 247 (Menston: The Scholar Press, 1970) (originally 1659), 'Berg-ælfenne. Oreades. *Elves or Fairies of the mountains*'). *Bergælfen* is unattested in known Anglo-Saxon manuscripts but it is a plausible formation (cf. the attested gloss *Oreades . muntælfen*). Nowell presumably either took *bergælfen* from a manuscript now lost or misremembered *muntælfen*. Without an Anglo-Saxon context, it can add little to the present discussion.

[11] Parkes, 'Leiden Riddle', 212–13.

Driades . uudu . aelfinne	*Dryades*: wood-*ælfenne*;
Amadriades uater . aelfinñ	*Hamadryades*: water-*ælfenne*;
Maides feld . aelfinne	*Maides*: open-land-*ælfenne*;
Naides sáe . aelfinne[12]	*Naiades*: sea-*ælfenne*

This faithfully glosses the *BCT*-texts of the *Etymologiae*, with the sole divergence of *Maides* for *Naides*.[13] The glosses were presumably added to elucidate Aldhelm's ensuing mention of *Castalidas nymphas* in the preface to the *Enigmata* (quoted in the next section).

Despite the Continental origin of Leiden Voss. Q 106, the glosses are Old English. They must have been composed after the arrival of Isidore's *Etymologiae* in Britain, by the late seventh century, glossing of which was under way at this time.[14] As with the language of the *Leiden Riddle*, a later addition to the same manuscript, the orthography of the glosses in Leiden Voss. Q 106 is characteristic of the seventh and eighth centuries, showing <uu> for /w, u:/, <ae> for later <æ>, and <i> in unstressed syllables.[15] The nominative plural inflection *-e* is non-West Saxon.[16] These readings are supported by the second manuscript of the glosses, the First Cleopatra Glossary from BL Cotton Cleopatra A.iii (considered in more detail below), whose tranche of around two hundred *Etymologiae*-glosses includes the *ælfen* glosses, and whose linguistic features point to a seventh- or eighth-century Mercian provenance.[17] The third manuscript of these glosses is the Antwerp–London Glossary, which I consider separately below on account of its special importance.

Commentators in recent decades have rightly been confident that *ælfen* was compounded with words for topographic features specifically to gloss Isidore's terms, a reading consistent with the punctuation in the Leiden manuscripts, which emphatically separates the two elements of each compound: we need not postulate categories of wood-elves, mountain-elves and sea-elves in Anglo-Saxon beliefs.[18] However, the element *ælfen* has hitherto been taken as a member of the common Old English lexicon: it is paralleled elsewhere in medieval West Germanic languages, where forms like *elbinne* are also used

12 Ed. Herbert Dean Meritt, *Old English Glosses: A Collection*, The Modern Language Association of America, General Series, 16 (New York: Modern Language Association of America; London: Oxford University Press, 1945), 61, collated with MS.

13 For the textual affiliations see Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi*, 1 vi–xii.

14 Michael W. Herren, 'The Transmission and Reception of Graeco-Roman Mythology in Anglo-Saxon England, 670–800', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 27 (1998), 87–103, at 90–1; Pheifer, 'Glossaries'; Philip G. Rusche, 'Isidore's *Etymologiae* and the Canterbury Aldhelm Scholia', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 104 (2005), 437–55, at 451–5; cf. Michael Lapidge, 'An Isidorian Epitome from Early Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 183–223 (first publ. *Romanobarbarica*, 10 (1988–9), 443–83), at 183–5, 188–93; Hall, 'The Evidence for *maran*', §3.

15 For the Leiden Riddle see Parkes, 'Leiden Riddle', esp. 211–16.

16 Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §590.

17 Wolfgang Kittlick, *Die Glossen der Hs. British Library, Cotton Cleopatra A. III: Phonologie, Morphologie, Wortgeographie*, Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe XIV, Angelsächsische Sprache und Literatur, 347 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1998), §§2.2, 4.2, 6.1.1, 14.2.5; Philip Guthrie Rusche (ed.), 'The Cleopatra Glossaries: An Edition with Commentary on the Glosses and their Sources' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1996), 373 [M356], 384 [N200, N201]; 396 [O215], cf. 129–34.

18 For example, Thun, 'Malignant Elves', 380.

to translate *nympha*, and it is thought to be represented in Middle English, being enshrined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Middle English Dictionary* under the headword *elven*.[19] This could encourage the reconstruction of a West Germanic **alβ(i)injō*, whose history would then extend from West Germanic into Middle English. However, Cooke has recently reassessed the evidence for a Middle English reflex of *ælfen*, finding all but one of the alleged examples simply to show the transference of *ælf* to the weak declension, a common development in Southern and Western Middle English, whereby plurals and some oblique singular forms emerged as *aluen(e)* or *eluen(e)*.[20] The sole example accepted by Cooke as an attestation of Middle English *elven* is line 14,278 of Laȝamon's *Brut*, 'To Argante þere quene, aluen swiðe sceone'.[21] Why he accepted it is not clear to me. Our manuscripts of the *Brut* are very irregular in their use of weak inflexions, and in theory *aluen* here could derive from *ælfen*. But it is surely better explained as a weak dative singular in apposition to *Argante* – thus 'to the queen Argante, a very beautiful *elf*', as I translated it at the beginning of this chapter – as with another innovative weak dative singular noun in line 11,272, 'And forð he gon wenden; to Arðure þan kingen' ('and they set out to travel to Arthur the king'; < Old English *cyning*, dative singular *cyninge*).[22] Other readings are possible, such as a weak genitive plural: 'to the queen Argante, a very beautiful [woman] of the *aluen*'. But either way, Cooke's acceptance of the line as evidence for a Middle English reflex of *ælfen* is less convincing than reading it to contain another example of a weak reflex of *ælf*.

Ælfen, then, is attested in English only in the textually interrelated Anglo-Saxon glossaries just listed. Meanwhile, although there is no doubt that the West Germanic forms are potential cognates of *ælfen*, they would also be natural independent formations: the **-injō* suffix has remained the normal suffix for forming nouns denoting females from nouns denoting males throughout the history of Continental West Germanic. Certainly, it is not

19 Verwijs, Verdam and Stoett, *Woordenboek*, s.v. *elvinne*; Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, new edn (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1965–) s.v. *ELBE*. Cf. *DOE*, s.v. *ælfen*.

20 William Cooke, '"Aluen swiðe sceone": How Long did OE *Ælfen/Elfen* Survive in ME?', *English Language Notes*, 41 (2003), 1–6. This declension change is unsurprising, since the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension (with nominative plural *-e*) to which *ælf* belonged was morphologically rather anomalous. That the weak declension was growing generally in spoken (Southern) Old English despite the conservatism of the written language is suggested by its popularity as a declension for loan-words, second only to that of the *a*-stem declension, as Helmut Gneuss, 'Latin Loans in Old English: A Note on their Inflexional Morphology', in *Language and History in Early England* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), chapter 6, argued. Other members of the declension occasionally exhibit weak forms already in early West Saxon (for example, *lēodan*, *seaxan*, *waran* for *lēode*, *seaxe*, *ware*): Campbell, *Grammar*, §610.7. Moreover, the plural masculine *i*-stems were identical in non-West Saxon dialects to the feminine *ō*-stem declension (to which the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem *lēod* was being attracted already in Old English, cf. chapter 1 n. 95); as unstressed vowels collapsed in later Old English, this would often have become the case in West Saxon too. This is noteworthy because the feminine *ō*-stems were particularly prone to transference to the weak declension: see for example S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne (ed.), *Þe liflade ant te passiun of Seinte Iuliene*, Early English Text Society, 248 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 213–14.

21 Ed. Brook and Leslie, *Laȝamon*, II 740.

22 Ed. Brook and Leslie, *Laȝamon*, II 588.

unlikely that an Anglo-Saxon glossator seeking to feminise *ælf* should have utilised the suffix *-en*. Other Old English examples of the suffix are *gyden* ('goddess', < *god* 'god'), *mennen* ('handmaid, female slave' < *mann* 'person') and *mynecenu* ('nun' < *munuc* 'monk'). The last example seems to have been coined in the tenth century, demonstrating the long productivity of the suffix; likewise the unique *mettena*, which glosses *Parcae* in chapter 35 of the Alfredian translation of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*, seems likely to be a nonce-word.[23] It is also worth emphasising that *ælfen* has no Norse cognate (contrast *áss~ásynja*): Scandinavians faced with terms such as Marie de France's *fée* instead used – and arguably coined – *álfkona* ('elf-woman').[24] That *ælfen* was indeed a nonce-word, formed by a glossator with no extant word suitable for glossing *nympha* and the like, is further suggested by the second textual tradition.

THE *LANDÆLFE* AND *DŪNÆLFA* GLOSSES

The source of the lemmata in this tradition is the invocation with which Aldhelm (d. 709/10) opened his *Carmen de virginitate*:

> Non rogo ruricolas versus et commata Musas
> Nec peto Castalidas metrorum cantica nimphas,
> Quas dicunt Elicona iugum servare supernum,
> Nec precor, ut Phoebus linguam sermone loquacem
> Dedat, quem Delo peperit Latona creatrix;
> Versibus infandis non umquam dicere dignor,
> Ut quondam argutus fertur dixisse poeta:
> 'Pandite nunc Elicona, deae, cantusque monete!'[25]

> I do not ask country-dwelling Muses for verses and parts of lines, nor do I seek songs in metre from the Castalian nymphs, who, they say, guard Helicon's celestial brow; nor do I beg that Phoebus, whom Latona his mother brought forth on Delos, grant my tongue loquacity of speech. I never deign to speak with vile verses, as once the clear-sounding poet is supposed to have spoken – 'Throw open Helicon, goddesses, and bring song to mind!'

The earliest manuscript to contain the glosses is the tenth-century Cleopatra

[23] On *mynecenu* see Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women*, 2 vols (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 1 29–30, cf. 97–107; Pauline Stafford, 'Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', *Past and Present*, 163 (May 1999), 3–35, at 10. Foot did not address the *i*-mutation in *mynecenu*, which must be analogical, nor its irregular transference to the feminine *ō*-stem declension, for which see Campbell, *Grammar*, §592c. The occurrence of *mettena* is ed. Sedgefield, *King Alfred's Old English Version*, 102; the other manuscript gives *gydena* 'goddesses'.

[24] *Guigemar*, line 704, ed. Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane, *Strengleikar: An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-One Old French Lais*, Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-institutt, norrøne tekster, 3 (Oslo: Kjeldeskriftfondet, 1979), 34; Alfred Ewert, *Marie de France: Lais*, new edn with introduction and bibliography by Glyn S. Burgess (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995), 21.

[25] Lines 23–30, ed. Rudolf Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*, Monumenta Germanicae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, 15 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1919), accessed from <http://www.dmgh.de/>, 7 November 2006, 353.

Glossary (mentioned already as a manuscript of the *ælfen* glosses), probably compiled and written at St Augustine's, Canterbury. The manuscript has generally been dated to the mid-tenth century, but Rusche has recently argued specifically for the 930s.[26] Of the three different glossaries contained in the manuscript, the first and third attest to the glosses. The Third Cleopatra Glossary (folios 92–117) contains *glossae collectae* – interlinear glosses, in this case to Aldhelm's *Prosa de virginitate* and *Carmen de virginitate*, extracted in sequence to form a glossary; despite its name, it or its exemplar was a source for the First.[27] The Third Cleopatra Glossary includes 'Ruricolas musas : landælfe; Castalidas ny*m*phas : dūnælfa; Elicona : swā hātte sīo dūn' ('country-dwelling *Musae*: *landælfe*; Castalian *nymphae*: mountain-*ælfa*; Helicon: so that mountain is named').[28] The First Cleopatra Glossary (ff. 5–75) partially repeats the Third with the entry 'Castalidas nymphas : dū̆nælfa'.[29] This gloss was to have a long history. It influenced the Latin of a medical text in the mid-tenth-century manuscript BL. Royal 12 D.xvii known as Leechbook III,[30] and is attested in the Old English invocation based by Byrhtferth of Ramsey on a glossed text of Aldhelm's like that in the Third Cleopatra Glossary.[31] It appears in the Antwerp–London Glossary, considered below. It also recurs in the eleventh-century BL Harley 3376, the now-fragmentary 'Harley Glossary', in the modified gloss on *Castalidas nymphas*, 'þā mānfullan gydena . ł dūnelfa' ('those sinful godesses, or mountain-*ælfa*'), the whole gloss written above the lemma on folio 17r.[32] The Harley Glossary shows alterations to and careful conflation of various sources, including texts related to the Cleopatra Glossaries: the use of *gydena* here seems to derive from a different gloss in the First Cleopatra Glossary, 'Nymphas : gydena' (cf. the once probably linked 'Castalidas : þā dū̆nlican'), deriving from another glossary to Aldhelm's *Carmen de virginitate* (numbered S12 by Kittlick).[33] Why all texts apart from

[26] Rusche, 'The Cleopatra Glossaries', 2–6, 33–8; cf. Ker, *Catalogue*, 180–2 [no. 143].

[27] On the glossary see Rusche, 'The Cleopatra Glossaries', 95, 156; Kittlick, *Glossen*, §2; cf. Ker, *Catalogue*, 182; on its textual affiliations Patrizia Lendinara, 'Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries: An Introduction', in *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1999), pp. 1–26, at 22–3; on this putative exemplar see Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 139–41.

[28] Ed. Rusche, 'The Cleopatra Glossaries', 51 [nos 1100–2].

[29] Ed. Rusche, 'The Cleopatra Glossaries', 225 [C460].

[30] See below, p. 106.

[31] Lapidge and Baker, *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, 134 (on the texual relationships see lxxxiii–lxxxiv, 319); cf. Rusche, 'The Cleopatra Glossaries', 99–104; Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 139–41.

[32] Ed. Robert T. Oliphant, *The Harley Latin–Old English Glossary Edited from British Museum MS Harley 3376*, Janua Linguarum, Series Practica, 20 (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), 59 [C475], collated with MS.

[33] Ed. Rusche, 'The Cleopatra Glossaries', 381 [N124], 229 [C558]. Kittlick, *Glossen*, §2.2; see §14.4.1 for provenance. On Harley's textual affiliations see generally Jessica Cooke, 'The Harley Manuscript 3376: A Study in Anglo-Saxon Glossography' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1994), 134–5, 144–5, 151; 'Worcester Books and Scholars, and the Making of the Harley Glossary: British Library MS. Harley 3376', *Anglia*, 115 (1997), 441–68, at 456–7. *Nymphas: gydena* may itself have been partly inspired by another tradition on which the First Cleopatra Glossary drew extensively (Rusche, 'The Cleopatra Glossaries', 16, 49–61), which is represented among Anglo-Saxon glossaries primarily by the early-ninth-century Corpus Glossary, but which according to W. M. Lindsay, *The Corpus, Épinal, Erfurt and Leyden Glossaries*, Publications of the Philological Society, 8 (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 62, derives from the Abstrusa Glossary, compiled on the Continent around the seventh

the Third Cleopatra Glossary give *Castalidas nymphas: dūnælfa* but not *ruricolas musas: landælfe* is not clear: *ruricolas musas: landælfe* could equally well have been added to the Third Cleopatra Glossary or dropped from the rest of the textual tradition. The glosses must originate between the composition of the *Carmen de virginitate*, and the earlier part of the tenth century. Linguistic evidence points to an eighth-century Anglian origin, but our glosses could be later additions to this tradition.[34]

I have been careful to cite the plural *dūnælfa* in its manuscript form. Although the sole attestation of *landælfe* uses the *-e* plural proper to the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem declension to which *ælf* belonged, ***dūnælfe* does not appear: rather the form in all cases except the Antwerp–London Glossary (which witnesses another development again) is *dūnælfa*, with the West Saxon strong feminine *-a* plural. If *dūnælfa* does derive from an Anglian original, this West Saxon plural must be a later introduction by a Southern redactor. Even so, given its suitability and consistency, it is surely a deliberate declension-change. In Old English, feminine words for humans invariably denoted females, while feminine words for animals were almost as consistent.[35] The innovation of *-ælfa* looks, then, to be a deliberate feminisation of the denotation of *ælfe*, sharing its intent with the form *ælfen* but not its means. Where *landælfe* fits into this is not clear: it could represent an original Anglian form (potentially feminine) which, by some slip, was not altered along with *dūnælfa* (and if so, the consequent semantic disjunction between gloss and lemma might explain its removal from the textual tradition), or a later addition to the tradition by a redactor who chose not to use the *-ælfa* form, perhaps because it was a neologism.

FEMININE *ÆLFE*, FEMALE *ELVEN*?

It appears that two glossators (or conceivably one glossator of wavering determination) were faced with words denoting the nymphs of Classical mythology, and both opted to gloss them with *ælf*. However, the glossators and/or their redactors were dissatisfied with using *ælf* alone, and found ways of feminising it. The difference between the strategies which they adopted strongly suggests that there was in eighth-century Old English no word with a female denotation corresponding in sense to *nympha*. This would be

century. To quote from the Corpus text, this tradition offered the gloss 'nimpha dea aque' (ed. W. M. Lindsay, *The Corpus Glossary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 120 [N109]; collated with Bernhard Bischoff *et al.*, *The Épinal, Erfurt, Werden, and Corpus Glossaries*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, 22 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1988), f. 43r), and this seems likely to have influenced or suggested the First Cleopatra Glossary's 'Nymphas : gydena'.

34 Kittlick, *Glossen*, §§2.2, 14.3.2.

35 Curzan, *Gender Shifts*, esp. 45, 60–6, 91 n. 7; Hans Platzer, '"No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxon?": On Grammatical Gender in Old English', *VIEWS*, 10.1 (2001), 34–47; accessed from <http://www.univie.ac.at/Anglistik/ang_new/online_papers/views/archive.htm>, 10 June 2005; cf. Lindheim, 'Weiblichen Genussuffixe', 490–1.

consistent not only with the fact that *ælf* is grammatically masculine, but with the fact that the early attestations of Old Icelandic *álfr* seem consistently to be associated with denoting males, while Old High German *alp* is likewise only clearly attested to denote males.[36] There is no need to doubt that the glossators knew what nymphs were: youthful, female, non-monstrous minor goddesses whose beauty was liable to attract the sexual attentions of gods and men. The glossator of the *Etymologiae*, of course, had Isidore's description before him, and both Aldhelm and his glossators made extensive use of this text.[37] Aldhelm's invocation is ostentatiously modelled on classical ones, particularly the opening of Virgil's *Georgics*; he was familiar with the *Aeneid*, at least parts of Ovid's nymph-packed *Metamorphoses*, and other pertinent texts.[38] Admittedly, the most prominent *nympha* known to the Anglo-Saxons must have been Circe, the witch-nymph who turned Ulysses's men into animal forms, but her exceptional status will have been clear; it is unfortunate that Circe's name is nowhere glossed into Old English, and that chapter 38 of the Old English translation of the *De consolatione philosophiae* calls her by the generic term *gyden*.[39] The recognition of *nymphae*'s non-monstrous character

[36] *AHDWB*, s.v. *alb*. As for German words for nymphs, the principal gloss is 'êkmagađi' ('oak-maidens') for *dryadas* (*Die althochdeutschen Glossen*, ed. Steinmeyer and Sievers 1879–1922, II 580; cf. *AHDWB*, s.v. *êkmagađ*). The early-medieval corpus was searched using Gerhard Köbler, *Lateinisch–altniederdeutsches Wörterbuch*, Göttinger Studien zur Rechtsgeschichte, Sonderband 14 (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1972) and Heinrich Götz, *Lateinisch–althochdeutsch–neuhochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1999).

[37] For Aldhelm's use see Nicholas Howe, 'Aldhelm's *Enigmata* and Isidorian Etymology', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 14 (1985), 37–59; John Marenbon, 'Les sources du vocabulaire d'Aldhelm', *Bulletin du Cange*, 41 (1979), 75–90; for glossators' Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 160–3, 165–71; Nancy Porter Stork, *Through a Gloss Darkly: Aldhelm's Riddles in the British Library* MS *Royal 12.C.xxiii*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts, 98 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 56–8; Rusche, 'Isidore's *Etymologiae*'. On Isidore's informative structuring of mythological hierarchy and divinity see Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 2 vols (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994–2000), I 141–5.

[38] *Georgics* I.1–42, ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, *Virgil: Eclogues; Georgics; Aeneid I–VI*, rev. edn by G. P. Gould, Loeb Classical Library, 63 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999–2000), I 98–100; on *Metamorphoses* see Andy Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 130–5, 200–2, 225–8.

[39] Ed. Sedgefield, *King Alfred's Old English Version*, 116, 195; Cf. *De consolatione philosophiae* 4, metre 3, ed. Moreschini, *Boethivs*, 111–12. Other texts mentioning Circe include the *Aeneid* 7.1–24, ed. Fairclough, *Virgil*, II 2; *Metamorphoses* 14.223–434, ed. and trans. Frank Justus Miller, *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, 3rd rev. edn by G. P. Gould, The Loeb Classical Library, 42–3, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), II 316–30. These stories were well known: see Susan Irvine, 'Ulysses and Circe in King Alfred's *Boethius*: A Classical Myth Transformed', in *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely'; Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*, ed. M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 387–401, at 387–93; Klaus Grinda, 'The Myth of Circe in King Alfred's *Boethius*', in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England, 7 / Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1447 (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 237–65 (first publ. Klaus R. Grinda, 'Zu Tradition und Gestaltung des Kirke-mythos in König Alfreds *Boethius*', in *Motive und Themen in englischsprachiger Literatur als Indikatoren literaturgeschichtlicher Prozesse: Festschrift zum 65. Geburtsdag von Theodor Wolpers*, ed. Heinz-Joachim Müllenbrock and Alfons Klein (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990), pp. 1–22); Aldhelm's ninety-fifth *enigma*, ed. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi opera*, I 142, and the late-tenth- or early-eleventh-century gloss on it in BL MS Royal 12 C xxiii studied by R. I. Page, 'The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England [2]: The Evidence of English Glosses', in *Latin and the Vernacular Languages in Early Medieval Britain*,

is suggested by their pointed omission from the *Liber monstrorum*, produced in an intellectual milieu associated with Aldhelm's.[40]

Nor was it in the interests of the original glossators to represent anything but the Classical mythological meanings of *nympha*. Aldhelm inverted Classical conventions by refusing the aid of *musae* and *nymphae* in composing his poetry, implying their worship to be unacceptable among Christians, while the later Harley version of the *dūnælfa* gloss explicitly calls the *Castalidae nymphae* 'mānfullan' ('sinful'). But for the pointed inversions of Aldhelm's invocation to be conveyed effectively, the vernacular glosses needed to represent the Classical semantics of the lemmata, so it is reasonable to take the glosses, in origin, to represent these meanings. Of the batches of Isidore glosses in the First Cleopatra and Antwerp–London glossaries deriving from S21, the *ælfen* glosses are almost alone in glossing lemmata which denote Classical mythological beings, so we have little other evidence for how the glossator who composed S21 tended to handle words for Classical mythological figures.[41] But the glossator's intention was presumably the same as Isidore's: to explain Classical mythology to a Christian audience. As with *dūnælfa* and *landælfe*, then, we may infer that the *ælfen*-glosses understand their lemmata in their Classical senses.

Turning finally to my concern with what words Anglo-Saxons did not use in glossing, we have two other textual traditions of Old English glosses on or translations of words for nymphs. I have mentioned above the Aldhelm gloss 'Nymphas gydena', which may reflect an older Latin glossing tradition and recalls the decision by the Old English translator of the *De consolatione philosophiae* to call Circe a *gyden*. This shows that *gyden* ('goddess') could be used to denote nymphs; but the term is a general one which conveyed little detail about the lemmata in question. The other tradition, going back to the seventh century, glosses *Echo*, understood as the name of the nymph rather than the word meaning 'reflected sound', with *wudumær* ('wood-*mær*').[42] *Mær* denoted monstrous female supernatural beings which assaulted people in their sleep; but in its original context (chapter 16 of Evagrius's *Vita Sancti Antonii*), *Echo* was used of demons, which is a sense quite different from how the words for nymphs are used in Isidore and Aldhelm. *Echo: wudumær* instead hints at the extensive lexicon of monstrous, dangerous and/or martial supernatural females available to Anglo-Saxons. Faced with Roman goddesses such as the powerful *Parcae* and the *Furiae*, the gods' instruments of vengeance; or words for monstrous females such as *incubae* and *strigae*, they adduced besides

ed. Nicholas Brooks (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 141–65, at 160–3 (now ed. Stork, *Through a Gloss*, 220–1, cf. 68–9).

40 The word *nympha* appears once, in entry I.34 – but it is used, contrary to the reader's expectation, with the punning sense of 'spring': Hall, 'The Evidence for *maran*', n. 3.

41 The certain exception is 'Furiæ : burgrūnan'; ed. Rusche, 'The Cleopatra Glossaries', 300 [F440]; 'Parce . hægtesse' in Antwerp–London, ed. Lowell Kindschi, 'The Latin–Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS 32 and British Museum MS Additional 32,246' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1955), 247 (collated with MS, f. 21v), appears to be another example.

42 'The Evidence for *maran*', §5.

gyden words such as *hægtesse*, *wælcyrige*, *burgrūne* and *wicce*. The evidence for these glosses is too extensive and tangled for consideration here, and I have accordingly made an exhaustive survey elsewhere.[43] Figure 6 is extracted from this, providing a visual summary of the core of the relevant material. It is focused on the Old English word *hægtes(se)*, since that word has already made a prominent appearance here in *Wið fǣrstice*, and it shows all the words which *hægtesse* is attested to gloss, and all of the words which, in turn, gloss those words in our corpus of Old English glosses.

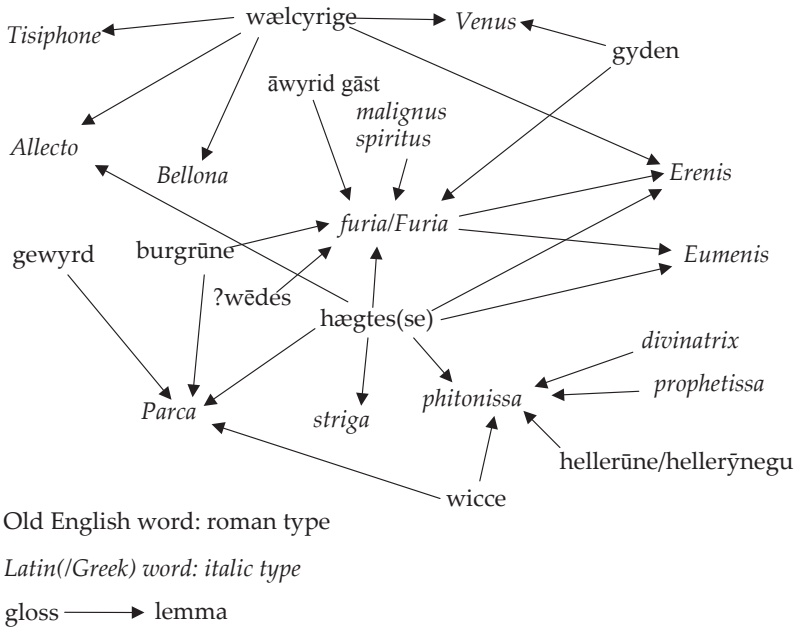

Figure 6. Words glossed by *hægtes(se)*, and words glossing those words

This diagram, if the term be pardoned, glosses over a range of complexities, but it will be clear that Old English was well endowed with words corresponding to Latin terms for mythological female shapers of fate, witches and violent, dangerous *Furiae*. Most of the Old English words are attested already in the eighth or ninth centuries.[44] *Wið fǣrstice*, of course, emphasises the point. This contextualises our evidence for glossators' difficulty in finding glosses for words for nymphs, suggesting that traditional Anglo-Saxon mythological females had rather different characteristics. A wider context again for this

[43] Alaric Hall, 'Continuity in European Witchcraft Beliefs: Early Medieval to Early Modern' for *Changes of Meaning and the Meanings of Change*, ed. Alaric Hall, Marianna Hintikka, Leena Kahlas-Tarkka, Roderick McConchie and Matti Rissanen (forthcoming); 'The Evidence for *maran*'.

[44] Cf. pp. 78–83.

apparent gap is suggested by the fact that whereas *Parca*, *Furia*, *Incuba* and *Striga* were all etymologically Latin, the words for nymphs were loans from Greek, once perhaps as unfamiliar in Roman culture as they were later to be in Anglo-Saxon culture.

The lack of an Old English word corresponding to *nympha* – or at least of a word which seemed fitting in the registers which the glossators drew on – does not necessarily mean that eighth-century Anglo-Saxons had no concept of female *ælfe*. But it does, at the least, suggest that female *ælfe* had a low cultural salience in early Anglo-Saxon England. Moreover, it is possible to show that this situation changed during the Old English period, and that by the earlier eleventh century, *ælf* could denote females. The Antwerp–London Glossary (Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus Museum M 16.2 and its *disiectum membrum* BL Additional 32,246) consists of various glossaries written in the margins of the manuscript's main Latin texts, among them a large Latin-English glossary organised by subject. This class-glossary was based either on Ælfric's class-glossary or on some shared source, written by the second of the two glossing hands at Abingdon in the earlier part of the eleventh century and called *article 6* by Porter and *d* by Ker.[45] In a miscellany at the end of the glossary, preserved now in London, the redactor gathered a group of words for prophets, workers of magic and otherworldly beings, combining the *ælfen* and *dūnælfa* traditions into the sequence 'Oriades . muntælfen . Driades . wuduelfen . Moides . feldelfen . Amadriades . wylde elfen . Naides . sæelfen . Castalidas . dūnelfen'.[46]

This text exhibits a striking morphological change: the form of *ælfen* attested in Leiden and Cleopatra is the grammatically expected plural *ælfenne*, but the form used in the Antwerp–London Glossary is *elfen*. This cannot reasonably be taken as a singular form: the glossator does not gloss plural lemmata with singular glosses.[47] Nor is it likely to reflect some miscopying of the exemplar's *ælfenne* forms, since the *-en* ending was extended to the inherited gloss *Castalidas nymphas: dūnælfa*, giving the form 'castalidas dūnelfen'. The only likely explanation for Antwerp–London's *elfen* plurals is that *ælfenne* was deliberately altered to become a weak plural, because *ælf* had both joined the weak declension and become able to denote females. The emendation would have been facilitated by the phonological levelling of unstressed vowels and the shortening of unstressed long consonants widespread in eleventh-century English, which not only encouraged the identification of <-enne> with <-an>, but permitted their replacement with <-en>.[48] The levelling of the endings of

[45] See David W. Porter, 'Æthelwold's Bowl and *The Chronicle of Abingdon*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 97 (1996), 163–7, at 163–4; 'On the Antwerp–London Glossaries', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 98 (1999), 170–92, esp. 181–8; Loredana Lazzari, 'Il *Glossario* latino-inglese antico nel manoscritto di Anversa e Londra ed il *Glossario* di Ælfric: dipendenza diretta o derivazione comune?', *Linguistica e filologia*, 16 (2003), 159–90; Ker, *Catalogue*, 1–3 [no. 2].

[46] Ed. Kindschi, 'The Latin–Old English Glossaries', 246; collated with MS, f. 21r.

[47] *Contra DOE*, s.v. *ælfen*.

[48] Hogg, *Grammar*, §§6.62, 7.80. The <-en>-spelling is surprising, as although it is consistent with early Middle English spellings of weak inflections and probably representative of eleventh-century phonology, it does not occur for etymological *-an* elsewhere in the glossary.

both *ælfenne* and *dūnælfa* to *-en* would, by this reading, show the transference of words to the weak declension evident in Southern and West-Midland Middle English, and specifically in early Middle English attestations of *elf*.[49] What is significant about this development for our purposes is that with it, the feminine marking of both *ælfen* and *dūnælfa* is lost: the weak plural *ælfen* in the Antwerp–London Glossary could denote females without any special feminisation. The development is emphasised by Laȝamon's characterisation of Argante as 'fairest alre aluen' and the description in the *South English Legendary* of female *eluene* quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The lexical gap which earlier glossators seem to have experienced had been filled by the earlier eleventh century, through the semantic extension of *ælf* from denoting males to denoting females.

Eighth-century Anglo-Saxons, then, had no vernacular word closely corresponding to Latin words for nymphs; the closest option was *ælf*, but that only denoted males. But by the earlier eleventh century, the meanings of *ælf* had extended to include a female denotation, later to be well attested in Middle English. Otherworldly, feminine supernatural beings similar to nymphs either did not exist for early Anglo-Saxons, or at any rate were not prominent in their ideologies – at least among the literate, probably aristocratic Anglo-Saxons who shaped our sources. But they were features of their belief a few centuries later. The rise of a female denotation of *ælf* appears concurrently, in the South, with the transference of *ælf* to the weak declension. But although this morphological change could have been a factor in creating the conditions for semantic change, it is not a sufficient explanation for it: other innovative early Middle English weak plurals like *cnihten*, *kingen* or *brethren* continued to denote males alone. The arrival of female *elven* in English culture must have involved other factors, linguistic and extra-linguistic. I will return to these factors in chapter 6. Here, however, I proceed to the other strand of our evidence for *ælfe*'s gender, the poetic word *ælfscȳne*.

ÆLFSCȲNE

The use of *ælf* as the basis for glossing words for nymphs might imply that *ælfe* shared the nymphs' characteristic beauty. Certainly there are numerous examples of beautiful female *elves* in later English-language material: in addition to Laȝamon's Argante, we are told by a fifteenth-century alchemical poet that

> In þe cyte of Damaske {Damascus} was Albert dwellyng
> And as he we*n*te be weld*er*nesse in a som*er*ys morweny*n*g

Presumably, the redactor of the Antwerp–London Glossary, rather like the later Tremulous Worcester Scribe, copied *-an* inflections in his exemplar conservatively, but when formulating his own weak plurals opted for a spelling more representative of his own speech (see Christine Franzen, 'The Tremulous Hand of Worcester and the Nero Scribe of the *Ancrene Wisse*', *Medium Ævum*, 72 (2003), 13–31), perhaps being encouraged in this by his exemplar's spelling <-en->.

[49] On which see Introduction, n. 8.

> Ther*e* he mette w*yth* Elchy3el fayr*e* & fr*e*
> Þe queen of elphys lond vndyr an ev {yew} tre.[50]

Two centuries later again, Andro Man confessed the Quene of Elphen to be 'verray plesand'.[51] It is safe to assume that the seductive *elves* of the *South English Legendary*, the *elf-queene* sought by Sir Thopas, or Milton's 'Faery Elves' were not bad-looking either. More strikingly, we have one Middle English attestation of *elf* as paradigmatic of (female) beauty: lines 5381–4 of *The Wars of Alexander*, an alliterative translation of the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni* composed in the north-west Midlands between about 1350 and 1450. At Alexander's first meeting with Candace, the queen of Prasiaca, we are told that

> Sire Alexsandire hire avises & all his hert li3tis,
> Him þo3t hire like at a loke his lady his modire.
> Scho was so faire & so fresche, as faucon hire semed,
> An elfe out of anothire erde or ellis an aungell.[52]

> Sir Alexander looks at her and his whole heart leaps; she seemed to him alike in appearance to his lady his mother. She was so beautiful and so vivacious, she seemed like a falcon, an *elfe* out of another world or else an angel.

The last two lines render 'Erat autem ipsa regina pulchra, formosa plurimum et decora' ('but that queen was beautiful, exceedingly shapely and decorous'), so *elf* was added by the English poet and its usage is presumably not influenced by Latin.[53] Such material finds numerous parallels in later and cognate traditions, among them the *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum* quoted in another context above, which states that the people of the *Álfar* 'var miklu friðara en engi onnur mankind a Norðrlondum' ('was much more beautiful/handsome than any other human race in the North-lands').[54]

How old or well established ideas like this were in Anglo-Saxon England, however, is less certain; it would be easy, for example, to attribute them to post-Conquest romance literature. Moreover, it is not clear how far a tradition of *ælfe*'s beauty may have encouraged the development of *ælf*'s female denotation and how far it might have resulted from that development. We have, however, another strand of evidence: the Old English compound *ælfscȳne*, occuring only in poetry, twice in *Genesis A* and once in *Judith*. This affords valuable evidence for the connotations of *ælf*. Various interpretations of *ælfscȳne* have been proposed. Stuart's 1972 article argued for the meaning 'inspired by God', but, though tacitly reported by the *Dictionary of Old English* (s.v. *ælfscȳne*), this interpretation bears little resemblance either to the word's literal meaning or to its contextual usage. We may also dispense with Häcker's argument

50 Ed. Peter Grund, 'Albertus Magnus and the Queen of the Elves: A 15th-Century English Verse Dialogue on Alchemy', *Anglia*, 122 (2004), 640–62, at 657.
51 Ed. Stuart, *Miscellany*, I 121.
52 Ed. Hoyt N. Duggan and Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Wars of Alexander*, Early English Text Society, s.s. 10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 167.
53 Cited by Duggan and Turville-Petre, *Alexander*, 292 n. to lines 5383–4.
54 See p. 50.

that, taking *ælf* to have become semantically associated with *engel* ('angel') on the basis of medieval German personal names and the similarity of Snorri Sturluson's *ljósálfar* to angels, '*Ælfscinu* may then describe Judith as angelic, i.e. "Beautiful and holy", rather than "beautiful as an elf", which would be more consistent with the character assigned to her by the Old English poet'.[55] The proposed semantic association of *ælf* with *engel* is neither inherently implausible nor, as my quotation from *The Wars of Alexander* suggests, without English parallels. But it is insufficiently supported for Old English: the only angels with which *ælfe* are clearly associated are fallen ones. Less convincing handlings of *ælfscȳne* do exist.[56]

Interpreting the primary evidence for *ælfscȳne* is affected by how the word *ælfscȳne* is thought to have related to the common Old English lexicon. The earlier of the two attesting poems seems certainly to be *Genesis A*, which on linguistic grounds seems to be of a date roughly similar to *Beowulf*.[57] *Judith*, for its part, is generally thought to be a late-ninth- or tenth-century composition.[58] Were *ælf-* a common element in Old English poetic compounds, it would be possible that two poets coined the same word independently, but since *ælfscȳne* is the only *ælf*-compound certainly attested in Old English poetry, this seems unlikely. More likely, *ælfscȳne* was a common (poetic) word, surviving only in the work of two independent poets. But it is also possible that it was coined by the *Genesis A*-poet – who relied on his audience to interpret *ælfscȳne*'s meaning – and borrowed directly by the *Judith*-poet, whose usage would reflect his reading of *Genesis A*. Though a shared oral-formulaic heritage has long been preferred as an explanation for shared diction between Old English poems, literary connections cannot be ruled out.[59] Either way, however, we must both return to the literary contexts in which *ælfscȳne* appears, and take account of the meanings of its constituent elements in order to establish what we can both about its meanings, and about the meanings of *ælf*.

Both attestations of *ælfscȳne* in *Genesis A* describe the seductiveness of Abraham's wife Sarah. The first occurrence is in lines 1822–9, when Abraham travels to Egypt because of famine in Canaan, and fears that the Egyptians will kill him for his wife:

55 Martina Häcker, 'The Original Length of the Old English *Judith*: More Doubt(s) on the "Missing Text"', *Leeds Studies in English*, 27 (1996), 1–18, at 9.

56 For example, Noel Williams, 'The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*: Making Meaning out of Thin Air', in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1376 (New York: Garland, 1991), pp. 457–78, at 465–6.

57 Fulk, *Meter*, 348–51, 391–2; Dennis Cronan, 'Poetic Words, Conservatism and the Dating of Old English Poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 33 (2004), 23–50.

58 Mark Griffith (ed.), *Judith* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 44–7; cf. Fulk, *Meter*, 197.

59 The prospect of a literary connection between the poems could be supported by the fact that *ælfscȳne* is one of four compounds appearing only in these poems, while, as Cronan, 'Poetic Words', 49, noted, the two also uniquely share the simplex *bælc* ('pride'). The other compounds are *blāchlēor* (*Judith*, line 128, *Genesis A*, line 1970), *ealdorduguþ* (*Judith*, line 309, *Genesis A*, line 2081), and *torhtmōd* (*Judith*, lines 6, 93; *Genesis A*, line 1502); cf. the similarity of *Judith*, lines 229–31 and *Genesis A*, lines 1991–3 noted by Griffith, *Judith*, 63 (envisaging these, however, to reflect shared oral-formulaic diction).

ongān þā his brȳd frēa .
wīshȳdig wer . wordum lǣran .
siððan ēgypte . ēagum mōton .
on þīnne wlite wlītan . wlance . monige .
þonne æðelinga eorlas wēnað .
mǣg ælfscīeno . þæt þū mīn sīe .
beorht gebedda . þē wile beorna sum .
him geāgnian .[60]

> Then the lord, wise-minded man, began to instruct his wife with words: 'After the Egyptians, many and proud, are able to look with their eyes upon your beauty, then the nobles of princes will expect, *ælfscȳne* wife, that you are my bright consort; one of those warriors will want to take you for himself.'

This is based on the Vulgate's 'dixit Sarai uxori suae novi quod pulchra sis mulier et quod cum viderint te Aegyptii dicturi sunt uxor ipsius est' ('he said to Sarah his wife "I know that you are a beautiful woman and that when the Egyptians see you, they will say 'she is his wife'"', Gen. 12.11–12).[61] The closest parallel for *ælfscȳne* here is *pulcher* ('beautiful'), though the correspondence is not necessarily direct. Abraham's prediction proves correct, the Pharaoh being seized with lust, taking Sarah, and being punished in due course by God (lines 1844–72). This process is repeated by Abimelech the king of Gerar, who also marries Sarah. However, being informed by God of his error, he rectifies the situation and in lines 2729–35 says to Sarah,

ne þearf ðē on edwīt . ābraham settan .
ðīn frēadrihten . þæt þū flettpaðas .
mǣg ælfscīeno . mīne trǣde .
ac him hygetēonan . hwītan seolfre .
dēope bēte . ne cēara incit duguða .
of ðisse ēðyltyrf . ellor sēcan .
winas uncūðe . ac wuniað hēr .[62]

> 'Abraham, your lord and master, does not need to put you in reproach because you, *ælfscȳne* lady, have trodden the paths of my dais; rather, rectify profoundly the insults to him with white silver. Do not choose, the two of you, to seek other companies, unfamiliar friends, elsewhere, outside this homeland, but dwell here.'

This renders Genesis 20.15–16, 'et ait terra coram vobis est ubicumque tibi placuerit habita. Sarrae autem dixit ecce mille argenteos dedi fratri tuo hoc erit tibi in velamen oculorum ad omnes qui tecum sunt et quocumque perrexeris mementoque te deprehensam' ('and he said, "wherever it suits you to settle, the land about you is yours". And to Sarah he said "behold, I have given a thousand pieces of silver to your brother. This will be for you as a veil of the eyes to all who are with you and wherever you go about; and remember that

60 Ed. A. N. Doane, *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 167; collated with Israel Gollancz (ed.), *The Cædmon Manuscript of Anglo-Saxon Biblical Poetry: Junius XI in the Bodleian Library* ([Oxford]: Oxford University Press, 1927), 86.

61 Ed. Robert Weber, *Biblia sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 2nd rev. edn, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975), I 18.

62 Ed. Doane, *Genesis A*, 211–13; Gollancz, *Cædmon Manuscript*, 130.

you were seized"').[63] Here, then, *ælfscȳne* has no direct parallel.

Judith's opening is lost, but *ælfscȳne* is used, in lines 12–14, at the surviving text's first description of Judith, as she proceeds to a feast held by Holofernes king of the Assyrians. Holofernes is attacking the holy city of Bethulia, and Judith is on a divine mission to seduce and kill him:

> gefrægen ic ðā holofernus
> winhātan wyrcean georne ond eallum wundrum
> þrymlic
> girwan up swæsendo to ðām het se gumena baldor
> ealle ðā yldestan ðegnas hīe ðæt ofstum miclum
> ræfndon rondwiggende cōmon tō ðām rīcan þēodne
> fēran folces rǣswan þæt wæs þȳ fēorðan dōgore
> þæs ðe iūdith hyne glēaw on geðonce
> ides ælfscīnu ǣrest gesōhte ·[64]

> Then Holofernes, I have heard, eagerly extended feast-invitations, and provided dishes with all sorts of wonders, and to this the leader of men invited all the most senior of his lords. Those shield-warriors accepted with great alacrity, they came travelling to that mighty king, to the ruler of the people. It was the fourth day when, clever in her planning, Judith, the *ælfscȳne* lady, first sought him.

The Old English *Judith* sticks less closely to its scriptural bases than *Genesis A*, and parallels are less straightforwardly identified; they are discussed below.

Ælfscȳne's generic element, *scȳne*, principally means 'beautiful' both etymologically and throughout medieval English.[65] Like *beautiful* it is used in a wide variety of contexts, but almost invariably of women rather than men (except that it is often used of angels, which may afford a parallel to its association with *ælf*). As I have discussed above regarding *Vǫlundarkviða*, there is also a strong association of feminine beauty with lightness and brightness throughout the Germanic languages.[66] Accordingly *scȳne* connoted and sometimes denoted brightness in medieval English – connotations which have been emphasised because of the Norse *ljósálfar*.[67] But were brightness the most important meaning of *ælfscȳne*, one would have expected a generic primarily denoting this (for example, *torht*, *beorht*). Beauty, rather than brightness, is unambiguously the significance of *ælfscȳne* in context: Sarah is a liability because she is *pulchra* ('beautiful'); Judith is called *ælfscȳne* when she steps forward to seduce Holofernes. *Ælfscȳne*, then, denotes a quality of feminine or perhaps angelic beauty modified by *ælf*. Of the attested semantic relationships within Old English noun + adjective compounds, *ælfscȳne* no doubt exhibits comparison

63 Ed. Weber, *Biblia sacra*, I 28.

64 Ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *'Beowulf' and 'Judith'*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 99; collated with Malone, *Nowell Codex*, f. 202r.

65 Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, 1898, s.v. *scīne*; *MED* s.v. *shēne*; *OED* s.v. *sheen*; *DOST*, s.v. *S(c)hene*.

66 See pp. 44–5. Cf. Roberts, Kay and Grundy, *Thesaurus*, §07.10 *Beauty, fairness*; cf. §03.01.12, *Brightness, light*.

67 For example, Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, s.v. *ælfscīnu*, a doublet of the superior entry s.v. *ælfsciene*; Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, II 449; North, *Heathen Gods*, 53.

(cf. *gærsgrēne* 'green as grass'; *hrīmceald* 'cold as frost').[68] This strongly implies that *ælfe* were not only characterised by beauty, as frost is characterised by coldness, but that they were a paradigmatic example of beauty, as frost is a paradigmatic example of coldness.

However, commentators' surprise at the comparison of biblical women with *ælfe* is not unjustified. Thun suggested that 'a certain lack of reflection over the exact meaning of words belonging to poetical vocabulary may in the last resort account for the word', but this should indeed be a last resort.[69] In no case is *ælfscȳne* necessary to the alliteration of the lines where it appears and alternative formulae were easy to come by. If *ælfscȳne* was part of the common lexicon and not a coining by the *Genesis A*-poet, it might have been a bahuvrihi compound, its meanings detached from those of its constituent elements (just as *bodice-ripper* denotes a kind of novel, not a ripper of bodices). But in either case, it is too rare for this to seem likely. We are prompted, however, to seek more specific connotations for *ælfscȳne* by comparison with similar compounds. *Hrīmceald* may tell us that frost is cold, but its function within the lexicon is to denote a specific severity of coldness. A plausible possibility has been suggested by several commentators. Swanton suggested that 'the primary sense of Old English *ælf* has sinister connotations', while North, apparently independently, took *ælfscȳne* to mean 'bewitchingly bright'.[70] Tolkien seems to have had the same idea already by the 1920s, when he composed an Old English poem *Ides Ælfscȳne*, inspired by later ballads, in which the poem's protagonist is seduced and abducted by a supernatural *ides ælfscȳne*.[71] These readings suggest that someone who was *ælfscȳne* was beautiful in a dangerously seductive way.

The women who are *ælfscȳne* are not simply beautiful, but perilously so. In *Genesis A*, Sara's beauty attracts lust which puts her desirers and her husband at risk. Abraham uses *ælfscȳne* when describing the threat posed by Sara's beauty; Abimelech calls Sara a 'mæg ælfscīeno' after discovering the dangers of divine retribution to which her beauty led him. Judith uses her beauty to seduce Holofernes and so assassinate him. The only other physical description of Judith before she decapitates Holofernes is that she is 'bēagum gehlæste hringum gehrodene' ('loaded with circlets, adorned with rings'), which parallels the much more detailed description of Judith's beautifying in Judith 10.3.[72] This being so, *ælfscȳne* is, in the surviving part of *Judith*, the only word certainly to parallel the Vulgate's various mentions

[68] On which see Charles T. Carr, *Nominal Compounds in Germanic*, St Andrews University Publications, 41 (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 340–1; Hans Marchand, *The Categories and Types of Present-Day English Word-Formation: A Synchronic-Diachronic Approach*, 2nd edn (Munich: Beck, 1969), §2.17; Dieter Kastovsky, 'Semantics and Vocabulary', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Volume 1: The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. Richard M. Hogg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 290–408, at 372–3.

[69] 'Malignant Elves', 392.

[70] Michael Swanton, *English Poetry before Chaucer* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 172; cf. 'Die altenglische Judith', 297; North, *Heathen Gods*, 53.

[71] Ed. in T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 306–7.

[72] *Judith*, lines 36–7, ed. Dobbie, *'Beowulf'*, 100; Malone, *The Nowell Codex*, f. 203r; the Vulgate text is ed. Weber, *Biblia sacra*, 1 702.

of Judith's beauty, increased by God 'non ex libidine sed ex virtute' ('not out of lust, but out of virtue'): 'cum vidissent eam stupentes mirati sunt nimis pulchritudinam eius'; 'erat in oculis eorum stupor quoniam mirabantur pulchritudinem eius nimis'; 'cumque intrasset ante faciem eius statim captus est in suis oculis Holofernis' ('when they had seen her they, wondering, were enchanted beyond measure by her beauty'; 'stupefaction was upon their eyes, since they were marvelling so much at her beauty'; 'and when she had entered before his person, suddenly Holofernes was captivated, through his own eyes').[73] In the Vulgate, then, Judith is jaw-droppingly beautiful through divine intervention; but the purpose of her beauty is not to reflect God's glory: it is to provoke Holofernes's sexual desire. It is hard to tell how much of this material finds representation in *ælfscȳne*. The Old English poem downplays Judith's seductiveness, and to some extent indeed her femininity.[74] However, the idea that *ælfscȳne* might connote entrancing beauty, perhaps also implying supernatural assistance, would fit the context admirably. The application to Judith of a word with such pejorative connotations is not an obstacle to this reading: as the Vulgate explicitly recognises, such entrancing beauty would in ordinary circumstances be condemned.

CONCLUSIONS

On the one hand, then, it is clear from the word *ælfscȳne* that by at least the ninth century, *ælfe* were paradigms of seductive, female beauty. This evidence fits nicely with the use of *ælf* as the basis for glossing words for nymphs, which were seductive, beautiful otherworldly females. Together, these sources support the arguments of chapter 2 for *ælfe*'s early anthropomorphicity, and to some extent with my characterisation of *ælfe* as otherworldly rather than monstrous; they emphasise that these characteristics continued in Anglo-Saxon beliefs despite the demonising representations in *Beowulf* and the Royal Prayerbook. However, *ælfscȳne* also affords fairly reliable evidence that *ælfe*'s beauty was characterised by a dangerous seductiveness; this is a theme to which I return in chapter 6, concerning the Old English medical texts connected with the word *ælfsīden*.

The most intriguing outcomes of this chapter, however, concern *ælfe*'s gender. The evidence of our glosses is that the semantics of *ælf* could not comfortably include a female denotation in early Old English. The extension of *ælf*'s semantics to the denotation of females is attested only in the eleventh century. If this analysis is correct, it presents a striking example of change in Anglo-Saxon non-Christian belief after the conversion to Christianity, suggesting the vitality of such beliefs in Christian Anglo-Saxon culture. But the analysis is complicated by the fact that the word *ælfscȳne* associates

[73] Jud. 10.4, 10.7, 10.14, 10.17; ed. Weber, *Biblia sacra*, 1 702–3.

[74] Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 38–40; cf. Mary Clayton, 'Ælfric's *Judith*: Manipulative or Manipulated?', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 23 (1994), 215–27, on Ælfric's similar response.

ælfe with feminine beauty well before the eleventh century. It is not clear how these different pieces of evidence should be squared. It is tempting to infer that a female denotation of *ælf* was a prerequisite for the formation of *ælfscȳne.* If it were, then the likelihood that *Genesis A* was composed in the eighth or ninth centuries would mean that female *ælfe* existed in Old English – and in a conservative register at that – much earlier than their first clear attestation in the Antwerp–London Glossary. However, there is a degree of methodological security in taking the evidence at face value: that early, male Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* were in some significant respects effeminate. *Ælfe*'s beauty would be a motivating factor for the use of the word *ælf* in glosses on words for nymphs, and for the subsequent extension of *ælf* itself to include a female denotation. I return to these problems to assess relations between *ælfe* and gender in detail in chapter 6. But there is more evidence to be assembled first, both on this issue and on others. This evidence arises from our Old English medical texts.

4

Ælfe, Illness and Healing (1): The 'Elf-Shot' Conspiracy

MEDICAL texts comprise the Old English genre which attests most often to *ælf*. At the beginning of this book, I sketched the image extracted from this material in the early twentieth century, which characterised *ælfe* as small, mischievous spirits who caused illness by shooting arrows (a phenomenon called 'elf-shot'). I have now also assembled the evidence for a quite different conception of *ælfe*: male, beautiful, human(-like), and otherworldly. It would be possible to square these conclusions with the medical texts simply by proposing that the medical texts exhibit the kind of demonisation of *ælfe* attested in *Beowulf* and the Royal Prayerbook. However, the need for a detailed and sustained reassessment of the medical texts, to see what evidence they really afford, is clear – and the resultant picture is both more complex and more interesting than what has hitherto been perceived. An important part of this revision has been done already: subsequently to her 1996 book, Jolly showed that the illustration to psalm 37 in the *Eadwine Psalter*, long imagined to depict 'elf-shot', is really a conventional depiction of demons, straightforwardly illustrating the psalm: 'the later iconography of elves as delightfully mischievous little figures playing tricks on people has caused scholars such as Grattan and Singer to read an Anglo-Saxon elf into this picture of demonic affliction'.[1] The present chapter focuses, then, purely on texts.

Three Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts attest to *ælf*, usually in somewhat peripheral contexts, suggesting a certain ambivalence about the appropriateness of the material.[2] I have discussed the late-tenth- or early-eleventh-century manuscript Harley 585 (in connection with *Wið fǣrstice*), and return to *Wið fǣrstice* at the end of this chapter; *ælf* occurs in Harley 585 once otherwise, in an attestation of *ælfsīden* considered in chapter 5. Likewise, I have discussed in chapter 2 the Royal Prayerbook's earlier, demonising attestation of *ælf*. Falling between these manuscipts in date is BL Royal 12 D. xvii, which contains the collections known as *Bald's Leechbook* (in two books) and *Leechbook III*. The manuscript is handsome if plain, written by the scribe who entered the batch of annals for 925–55 into the Parker Chronicle.[3] This suggests that the

1 'Elves', at 20, citing Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, frontispiece.

2 Cf. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 301–2, on the early English prayer-books and Roy Michael Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon Prognostics in Context: A Survey and Handlist of Manuscripts', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 30 (2001), 181–230, on the tension between the enthusiasm of Anglo-Saxon clerics for prognostic texts and the objections of sermonisers.

3 See C. E. Wright (ed.), *Bald's Leechbook: British Museum, Royal Manuscript 12 D. xvii*, Early

manuscript was produced at Winchester in the mid-tenth century, the political bias of the Chronicle entries consolidating the obvious assumption of links to King Edmund's court.[4] Some of the contents of Bald's Leechbook, however, show associations with the court of Alfred the Great, whose personal concerns with illness and vernacular writing provide a plausible context for the text's original compilation. This seems to have been undertaken, with impressive care, by several compilers, to a large extent from existing sources; much of the content is translated from Latin, putting the text at the cutting edge of early-medieval Western medicine.[5] Either way, the royal associations of both text and manuscript are sufficient to suggest the social circles to whose beliefs the material most reliably attests. The other text in Royal 12 D. xvii, Leechbook III, exhibits less Latin influence, and so may reflect traditional Anglo-Saxon medicine better, though this need not mean – as Cameron thought – that it is an earlier collection.[6] There is no modern published edition of Royal 12 D.xvii, and since facsimiles are as accessible as Cockayne's edition, where folio references are easily found, I cite from Wright's facsimile of the manuscript.[7] I have taken the usual editorial liberties of expanding abbreviations and normalising word-separation.

There are many ways in which this material could be presented. A remedy may be linked to another relevant text by shared vocabulary, to a further text by the history of its transmission, and another again by its manuscript context. I have grouped the texts in two ways. One group of remedies, from a range of collections, is connected by sharing the word *ælfsīden* or its cognate *sīdsa*, or by being textually related to remedies which do. This group is of special interest, because *sīden* and *sīdsa* are cognate with the Old Norse *seiðr*, which denotes a kind of magic and has received much recent attention. Accordingly, I have drawn together this material as the focus of chapter 5. The other remedies are less entangled. These I discuss in this chapter in an order based on their date and manuscript attestations. Although they attest to a range of associations for *ælfe*, they are to a large extent connected by their relations to the historiographical construct of 'elf-shot', which affords the present chapter's thematic thread.

The medical texts themselves are not the only material with a bearing

English Manuscripts in Facsimile, 5 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1955), 12–27; cf. Ker, *Catalogue*, 332–3 [no. 264]; A. L. Meaney, 'Variant Versions of Old English Medical Remedies and the Compilation of Bald's *Leechbook*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 13 (1984), 235–68, at 250–1; Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 30–1.

4 See Clare Downham, 'The Chronology of the Last Scandinavian Kings of York, AD 937–954', *Northern History*, 40 (2003), 25–51, at 31.

5 Meaney, 'Bald's *Leechbook*', 236, 243–5; Richard Scott Nokes, 'The Several Compilers of Bald's *Leechbook*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 33 (2004), 51–76; Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 31, 42–5, 77–99. Cf. Audrey L. Meaney, 'Alfred, the Patriarch and the White Stone', *Aumla: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, 49 (May 1978), 65–79; Wright, *Bald's Leechbook*, 17–18; David Pratt, 'The Illnesses of King Alfred the Great', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 30 (2001), 39–90, at 69–71.

6 Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 35–42.

7 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II; Wright, *Bald's Leechbook*; cf. Doane, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, no. 298.

on *ælfe*'s associations with illness. Some more tangential evidence derives also from glosses and a plant-name containing *ælf-*, which I have analysed in detail elsewhere, referring to the material here where it is relevant.[8] Likewise, I only touch, for lack of space, on the associations with illness of *ælf*'s cognates and reflexes – though most of the known later-medieval English evidence is referred to here. I have reassessed potential early Modern Scottish comparative material elsewhere.[9] Medieval German evidence appears only occasionally.[10] However, it is important to appreciate that the associations of *ælfe* with illness seem to be part of a wider and presumably older tradition. Perhaps significantly, the evidence is mainly West Germanic. I look in detail at medieval Scandinavian material in the next chapter, but it is noteworthy that despite the wealth of Icelandic saga-evidence for witchcraft and illness, associations of *álfar* with illness are rare and sometimes have German origins.[11] It may be that the extensive attestations in later Scandinavian folklore reflect the spread of German culture through the Hanseatic league.[12]

'ELF-SHOT' IN BALD'S LEECHBOOK II, *GIF HORS OFSCOTEN SĪE*

Ælf occurs in Bald's Leechbook in three remedies. One, from Book I, uses the word *ælfsīden* and is accordingly considered in chapter 5. The others both occur in section 65 of Book II, occurring, towards the end of the text, on folios 106a–108a. One of these is our unique attestation of *sīdsa* and is, again, considered alongside *ælfsīden*. As Nokes and I have independently argued, section 65 was probably added after Bald's original compilation.[13] Its remedies

8 Alaric Hall, 'Elves on the Brain: Chaucer, Old English, and *elvish*', *Anglia*, 124 (2006), 225–43; 'Madness, Medication and Self-Induced Hallucination: *Elleborus* (and Woody Nightshade) in Anglo-Saxon England, 700–900', in *From Seaweed to Juniper: Anglo-Saxon Plant-Studies*, ed. Carol Biggam (forthcoming); see further chapter 6.

9 'Getting Shot'; cf. Alaric Hall, 'Continuity'; 'Folk-Healing, Fairies and Witchcraft: The Trial of Stein Maltman, Stirling 1628', *Studia Celtica Fennica*, 3 (2006), 10–25; available at http://www.sfks.org/>, <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/3102/.

10 See further Monika Schulz's recent analyses of the Corpus der deutschen Segen und Beschwörungsformaln. *Magie oder: Die Wiederherstellung der Ordnung*, Beiträge zur europäischen Ethnologie und Folklore, Reihe A: Texte und Untersuchungen, 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2000); M. Höfler, *Deutsches Krankheitsnamen-Buch* (Munich: Piloty & Loehele, 1899), s.vv. *Alp*, *Elbe*, cf. s.v. *Mar*; Verena Holzmann, '"Ich beswer dich wurm vnd wyrmin. . .": Die magische Kunst des *Besprechens*', *LiLi: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 130 (2003), 25–47, at 27–30; cf. Cyril Edwards, 'Heinrich von Morungen and the Fairy-Mistress Theme', in *Celtic and Germanic Themes in European Literature*, ed. Neil Thomas (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1994), pp. 13–30.

11 See pp. 132–4.

12 For modern Scandinavia see for example Nils Lid, 'Um finnskot og alvskot: Eit område av norsk sjudomsmagi', *Maal og minne* (1921), 37–66; Bente Gullveig Alver and Torunn Selberg, 'Folk Medicine as Part of a Larger Concept Complex', *Arv*, 43 (1987), 21–44; cf. Lauri Honko, *Krankheitsprojektile: Untersuchung über eine urtümliche Krankheitserklärung*, FF Communications, 178 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1959).

13 Nokes, 'Bald's *Leechbook*', 67–8; Alaric Hall, 'Calling the Shots: The Old English Remedy *Gif hors ofscoten sie* and Anglo-Saxon "Elf-Shot"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 106 (2005), 195–209, at 196 n. 3; available at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/3052>. Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 151–4, considered these ailments an 'odd collection' (at p. 154), but the groupings may be more coherent than

are listed in the contents list to Book II on folio 64v:

> Lǣcedōm gif hors sīe ofscoten ⁊ wiþ ūtwærce . ⁊ gif ūtgang forseten sīe . ⁊ wiþ lenctenādle . eft wiþ ūtwærce ⁊ wiþ unlybbum ⁊ wiþ þǣre geolwan ādle ⁊ gif men sīe fǣrlice yfele ⁊ to gehealdanne līchoman hǣlo ⁊ wiþ gicþan ⁊ ælue ⁊ wiþ londādle ⁊ gongelwæfran bite . ⁊ wið ūtsihte ⁊ hēafodsealfa .
>
> Remedy for if a horse is *ofscoten*; and one for ?dysentery; and one if excrement is obstructed; and one for *lenctenādl*; another for ?dysentery; and one for *unlybban*; and one for the yellow ailment; and one if the sudden evil be upon a person; and one to keep the body healthy; and one for scabs [perhaps an ailment such as psoriasis]; and [against an] *ælf*; and one for *londādl*; and one [for] spider's bite; and for ?dysentery [at any rate, some bowel disorder]; and head-salves.[14]

It is the first remedy in section 65, *Gif hors ofscoten sīe*, on folio 106r, that concerns us here:

> Gif hors ofscoten sīe. nim þonne þæt seax þe þæt hæfte sīe fealo hrȳþeres horn ⁊ sīen .III. ærene næglas on. Wrīt þonne þām horse on þām hēafde foran crīstes mǣl þæt hit blēde . Wrīt þonne on þām hricge crīstes mǣl ⁊ on leoþa gehwilcum þe þū ætfēolan mæge. nim þonne þæt winestre ēare þurh sting swīgende. Þis þū scealt dōn. genim āne girde slēah on þæt bæc þonne biþ þæt hors hāl. ⁊ āwrīt on þæs seaxes horne þās word. Benedicite omnia opera domini dominum. Sȳ þæt ylfa þe him sīe þis him mæg tō bōte.
>
> If a horse is badly pained [*ofscoten*]. Take then a dagger whose haft is of fallow-ox's horn and in which there are three brass nails. Write/inscribe on the horse, on the forehead, Christ's mark, so it bleeds. Write/inscribe then Christ's mark on the spine and on each of the limbs which you can grasp.[15] Then take the left ear, pierce it in silence. This shall you do: take a staff; strike on the back; then the horse will be well. And write/inscribe on the dagger's handle these words: *bless all the works of the Lord of lords*. Should it be *ælfe*'s, which is on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse].

Historiographically, this remedy is crucial, as it has prompted most of the identifications of 'elf-shot' in our Old English corpus. Despite its obvious

at first they seem. *Ælf* may, in fact, be a connecting feature. Of the fifteen remedies listed, three concern bowel problems and one jaundice – itself associated with internal pains (see n. 47) – while *gif hors ofscoten sīe*, which mentions *ælfe*, also concerns internal pains. Another is against an *ælf* (see pp. 120–1), while cutaneous ailments (cf. *gicðan*) are associated with *ælfe* (pp. 106–8). Remedies against a spider's bite closely follow a series on fevers, madness and demonic and magical afflictions including *ælfsīden* in Book I of Bald's Leechbook (ff. 50v–54r, nos 57–68; see further below, pp. 124–6). Although *lungenādl* is not elsewhere associated with *ælf*, it is incorrectly listed in the contents as *lenctenādl*, which is (pp. 121–3). These latter ailments relate fairly closely to the beneficial properties of jet as described in the following section, while, as Peter Kitson, 'From Eastern Learning to Western Folklore', in *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Manchester: Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, University of Manchester, 1989), pp. 57–71 pointed out at pp. 60–1, the only remedy in the Old English medical texts to prescribe jet occurs in section 65, in the remedy *Wið ælfe*.

14 The fact that *wiþ* is absent before *ælf* might indicate that that remedy was viewed to be for a more specific form of *gicða*, an interpretation also invited by the fact that the beginning of the remedy *wið gicþan* on folio 107v is set into the margin and the beginning of the following remedies are not. However, these might respectively result from stylistic variation and the fact that the remedy *wið gicþan* happened to start on a new line, whereupon the scribe of Royal 12 D. xvii set the first into the margin as a matter of course.

15 On this translation see Hall, 'Calling the Shots', 197 n. 6 (*contra DOE*, s.v. *æt-fēolan* §3a, following instead §1).

title, *Gif hors ofscoten sīe*, given here and in the contents list, this remedy was entitled *Wið ylfa gescot* by Grendon and *Wiþ ylfa gescotum* by Storms.[16] Moreover, the first clause, for which I suggest the literal translation 'if a horse is badly pained', was translated by Grendon as 'if a horse is elf-struck', by Storms as 'if a horse is elf-shot', and, circumspectly but in accordance with this tradition, by Jolly as 'if a horse is [elf]shot [*ofscoten*]'.[17] This translation has also entered the dictionaries.[18] However, these readings derive from a misunderstanding of Cockayne's translation 'if a horse is elf shot': Cockayne's glossary entry for *ofscoten* shows that in fact he meant this as an idiomatic rendering meaning 'dangerously distended by greedy devouring of green food'.[19]

There is no good reason to link the verb *ofscēotan* to the agency of *ælfe*. Thun, stating what other scholars imply, deduced that 'the mention of *ylfa* makes it seem likely that the elves were thought to be those who were shooting'.[20] This inference is predicated on the idea that *ofscēotan* connotes the shooting of missiles, for which we must posit a source. However, although *scēotan* literally denotes thrusting or shooting, later in English it had specific medical meanings along the lines of 'to afflict, cause pain; have darting pains'; the prefix *of-* would simply have an intensifying force.[21] This putative meaning is not otherwise clearly paralleled in the Old English medical texts, though Leechbook III and Harley 585 share a remedy 'wið scēotendum wenne' ('against a *scēotend* growth'), which seems likely to attest to *scēotan* in a similar sense, unless it is an early attestation of the sense 'to sprout, to spring forth'.[22] As Cockayne realised, *Gif hors ofscoten sīe* almost certainly concerns internal pains rather than a projectile wound, actual or metaphorical.

Thun's claim was also predicated on the idea that *ælfe* are integral to the remedy. It is the last sentence of the remedy, 'Sȳ þæt ylfa þe him sīe þis him mæg tō bōte', which actually mentions *ælfe*, providing the only support for reading 'elf-shot' into the text. This sentence is rather convoluted and it has hitherto been mistranslated. Cockayne offered 'Be the elf what it may, this is mighty for him to amends'.[23] This implies that an *ælf*, which might be one of various sorts, is somehow assailing the horse. Subsequent commentators have basically followed Cockayne. Grendon translated 'Be the elf who he may, this will suffice as a cure for him' and Singer 'Be the elf who he may, this has power as a remedy'.[24] Storms went further, offering 'Whatever elf

16 Felix Grendon, 'The Anglo-Saxon Charms', *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 22 (1909), 105–237, at 208–9; G. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1948), 248–9.

17 *Popular Religion*, 152.

18 Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, s.v. *ofscēotan*; John R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th rev. edn by Herbert D. Meritt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), s.v.

19 *Leechdoms*, II 291 (and n. 1), 401. Cf. Hall, 'Calling the Shots', 197–201.

20 'Malignant Elves', 385.

21 *MED*, s.v. *shēten* §6b; *OED*, s.v. *shoot*, *v.* §I.5, *shooting* §3; cf. Höfler, *Deutsches Krankheitsnamen-Buch*, s.v. *schiessen* on German parallels.

22 Ed. Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 148; cf. Leechbook III, section 30; ed. Wright, *Bald's Leechbook*, f. 117r. *MED*, s.v. *sheten* §2b; *DOST*, s.v. *schute* §I.6.

23 *Leechdoms*, II 291.

24 Grendon, 'The Anglo-Saxon Charms', 209; Singer, 'Early English Magic', 358.

has taken possession of it, this will cure him'.[25] Jolly and, most recently, Pettit, have improved on Cockayne's handling of 'þe him sīe' with, respectively, the more conservative translations 'Whatever elf is on him, this can be a remedy for him' and 'Whatever kind of elf it is, this can be a remedy for it'.[26] But all these translations mishandle the first part of the sentence – more because each translator has unthinkingly followed Cockayne's error than because it is especially difficult – and we should instead translate, 'If that [ailment] be *ælfe*'s, which is on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse]'. But since the alternative is so well established, it is appropriate to discuss the translations' relative merits in detail.

The main clause of the sentence ('þis him mæg tō bōte') is hard to render idiomatically in English because of the usage of *magan*, but its meaning is not in doubt. But Cockayne clearly had difficulty with the subordinate clause ('Sīe þæt ylfa þe him sīe', translated 'Be the elf what it may'). It might be possible to take *him* in *Sȳ þæt ylfa þe him sīe* reflexively to refer to the subject, producing a literal rendering along the lines of 'Be that [creature] of *ælfe*, which he may in himself be', but extracting such a sense is tortuous, and the available parallels dubious.[27] Moreover, a much simpler reading is available, as Jolly's translation suggests. *Him* would naturally be taken to refer to the indirect object of the sentence, as it does in the main clause (as in Cockayne's 'this is mighty *for him* to amends'), while clause-initial subjunctives like *sȳ* (third person singular present subjunctive of *wesan* 'to be') were used in inverted conditional clauses to express uncertainty (cf. 'be he alive or dead. . .').[28] This suggests the reading 'Be *þæt ylfa*, which may be on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse]'. Similar constructions are 'gif hyt þonne sȳ þæt sīo wamb sy āþundeno, scearfa ðonne þā wyrte 7 lege on þā wambe' ('If it should then be that the stomach is swollen, scrape those plants and lay [them] on the stomach') in the Old English *Herbarium* and 'sȳ þæt sār þǣr hit sȳ, smīte mon ðā sealfe ǣrest on þæt hēafod' ('Be the pain where it may, one should smear the salve first on the head') in *Lacnunga*, and from the laws *V Æthelstan* 'gif hit sȳ ðegen ðe hit dō, sȳ þæt ilce' ('if it be a thegn who does it, be that [punishment] likewise').[29]

The subject of the conditional clause must be *þæt*.[30] Cockayne tried to explain *þæt ylfa* as a partitive genitive (a construction along the lines of 'one of the *ælfe*'), but faced difficulties because *ælf* is masculine and *þæt* is neuter

25 *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 249.

26 Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 152; Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 221 n. 583; cf. 252.

27 See Bruce Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), I §§271–4.

28 Mitchell, *Syntax*, II §§3678–80.

29 Respectively ed. Hubert Jan De Vriend, *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, The Early English Text Society, 286 (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), 38; Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 112; F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle a. S.: Niemeyer, 1903–16), I 168.

30 *Ylfa* can, if declining regularly, only be a genitive plural: see Appendix 1 below. Even if it shows the same transference to the feminine *ō*-stem declension as the form *dunælfa* (see above, p. 83), a plural could not be the subject of the singular verb, which is, in any case, intransitive, leaving no function for *þæt* if *ylfa* were to be taken as the subject.

(we would have expected ***sīe sē hē ylfa*). He therefore sought a parallel for reading the neuter pronoun to refer to the masculine *ylfa* in the construction *ic hit eom*.[31] This example seems of dubious relevance, but Cockayne's interpretation might be viable insofar as neuter demonstratives are occasionally used of grammatically masculine nouns with asexual denotees, in which case we must suppose that *ælfe* were viewed as asexual in this text.[32] But it would be much more plausible to take *þæt* to refer to the illness with which the horse is afflicted, with *ylfa* as a straightforward possessive genitive: 'if that [ailment] be *ælfe*'s, which is on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse]'. This is unambiguously the case in 'sȳ þæt sār þǣr hit sȳ', where *sār* is the restatement of an antecedent. Hence the translation which I gave above: 'Should it be *ælfe*'s, which is on it, this will do as a remedy for it'.

This means that the last sentence of *Gif hors ofscoten sīe*, the one which mentions *ælfe*, opens with a conditional clause, showing that *ælfe* are not necessarily involved in the illness at all. The remedy implies only that the ailment might in some way belong to *ælfe*, and advocates an extra measure for use should this be the case. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that after the striking of the horse, we are told 'þonne biþ þæt hors hāl' ('then the horse will be well'), a closing-formula in the texts.[33] The following note 'ꝛ āwrīt on þæs seaxes horne þās word. Benedicite omnia opera domini dominum. Sȳ þæt ylfa þe him sīe þis him mæg tō bōte' is an addition. This is consistent with the existence of three remedies for *gescoten* horses which do not mention *ælfe*.[34] Several previous commentators, however, have interpreted these otherwise, Thun again making his inferences explicit. Having concluded that the *ofscoten* horse had been shot by 'elves' in the text which mentions them, he deduced that

> the term *gescoten* in *Lacnunga* is a synonym of *ofscoten* in *Læceboc*. If we accept elves as being the shooting spirits in the two passages in *Læceboc* . . . it will seem highly probable that they were thought of as shooting also in *Lacnunga*.[35]

Subsequently, various other texts including neither *ælf* nor *scēotan* have, at times, been identified as remedies for 'elves', helping the idea of 'elf-shot' and other malicious actions by 'elves' to spread through the corpus.[36] But this reasoning is inverted: the absence of *ælf* in all these texts militates against *ælfe*'s general presence, not for it.

What, then, can we infer from *Gif hors ofscoten sīe* about *ælfe*? A redactor of the remedy thought that one possible cause of a horse being *ofscoten* might be *ælfe*. This chimes both with the Old English compound *ælfsogoða*, considered

31 *Leechdoms*, II 291 n. 2.
32 See Mitchell, *Syntax*, I §68.
33 See Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 40.
34 Bald's Leechbook I no. 88 (f. 58), textually related to *Lācnunga* no. 118, f. 171r (ed. Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 168); and *Lācnunga* no. 164, ff. 182v–183r (ed. Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 184–6). See further Hall, 'Calling the Shots', 201.
35 'The Malignant Elves', 383; cf. Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 250; Grendon, 'The Anglo-Saxon Charms', 164; Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 185; Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 1, 143.
36 See Hall, 'Calling the Shots', 201; a further example is Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 300.

below, and with the fact that Middle English and Older Scots attest to compounds of *elf* with a variety of words (including Older Scots *schot*) bearing meanings along the lines of 'sharp pain' and 'seized with pain'.[37] Meanwhile, according to Martin Luther's *Tischreden*,

> Multa saepe dixit Lutherus de fascinatione, *von herzgespan und elbe*, et quomodo mater sua vexata esset a vicina fascinatrice, ita ut coacta esset eam reverendissime tractare et conciliare, *den sie schoß ihre kinder, daß sich zu tode schrien*.[38]
>
> Luther spoke very often about witchcraft, *about pains in the diaphragm and 'elbe'*, and how his mother had been troubled by a neighbouring witch, so that she had been forced to treat her very respectfully and to conciliate her, *because she 'schoß' her children, so that they screamed themselves half to death*.

Schiessen is cognate with *scēotan* and appears here in collocation with both *alp* and another word denoting an ailment, sensed in the torso and literally called 'heart-strain'. Though shared collocations could reflect common innovations or cultural loans, this text does hint that the collocation of *ælf* with *scēotan* and internal pain derives from the shared culture of West Germanic-speakers. Whatever the case, *Gif hors ofscoten sīe* seems to be an early attestation of a linguistic tradition which was to have a long life in English, associating *ælfe* with causing internal pains. But precisely how *ælfe* were involved in making a horse *ofscoten* is neither indicated by the remedy, nor, reliably, by its later analogues. Luther's text also raises the prospect of *elben* acting as agents for witches, a development which can probably be traced in witchcraft trials from early Modern English- and German-speaking contexts, and this would fit with some of our Scandinavian comparative evidence for *ælfsīden* considered below; in particular, our first attestation of *elf-shot* in English comes in a sixteenth-century manuscript of a literary curse directed by John Rowll against the thieves of his poultry around 1492×1503, in which he wishes them

> The mowlis {chilblains} and in þair sleep þe mare
> The canker {sore} also and the caterss {rheums}
> And never to be but {without} schot of blude {of uncertain meaning}
> Or elf schot þus to conclude
> and mony vther maletais {maladies}[39]

Though not a serious curse, Rowll's text does effectively invoke *elvis* against someone else: did others do the same in earnest? Earlier English evidence, however, is hard to come by. The idea of sending *ylues* to afflict an individual may underlie the verse lament of the hero Wade quoted in a sermon *Humiliamini*

[37] Hall, 'Getting Shot', 23–7.

[38] Ed. E. Kroker, *Tischreden*, D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 6 vols (Weimer: Böhlau, 1912–21), III 131 [no. 2982b].

[39] Ed. W. A. Craigie, *The Maitland Folio Manuscript: Containing Poems by Sir Richard Maitland, Dunbar, Douglas, Henryson, and Others*, 2 vols, The Scottish Text Society, Second Series, 7, 20 (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1919–27), I 163 (lines 67–9); cf. Hall, 'Getting Shot', 23, and more generally 28–34; Emma Wilby, 'The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland', *Folklore*, 111 (2000), 283–305; Edwards, 'Heinrich von Morungen', 21; below, pp. 151–3.

sub potenti manu dei ut vos exaltet in tempore visitationis in the twelfth-century manuscript Peterhouse College Cambridge 255:

> Su*m*me sende ylues & summe sende nadderes.
> sumne sende nikeres the bide*n* pates[40] punien.
> Nister man nenne bute ildebrand onne.[41]

> Some send *elves* and some send snakes; some send *nikeres* [water-monsters] which dwell by the water [reading *pater*]; no one is there but Hildebrand alone.

The impliction here seems to be that some hostile force sent *ylues* to beset Wade, implying an ability to co-opt them into causing harm to members of the in-group. Though early and English, however, Wade's complaint is too short and ill contextualised to be developed.

OTHER *ÆLF*-AILMENTS: LEECHBOOK III, FF. 123A–125V

Leechbook III is markedly more concerned with diabolical threats, ailments whose names contain *ælf*, and what Jolly termed 'mind-altering afflictions', than Bald's Leechbook. These matters dominate sections 54–68 (ff. 122v–127r). (*Ælf* also occurs in Leechbook III, section 41, in the compound *ælfsīden*, but I consider this separately in chapter 5.) Within this sequence are three contiguous sections, 61–3, respectively concerning *ælfcynn*, *ælfādl* (apparently comprehending *ælfsogoða*) and *wæterælfādl*, as the contents list on folio 110v describes:

> .lxi. Wiþ ælfcynne sealf ⁊ wiþ nihtgengan . ⁊ þām monnum þe dēofol mid hæmð. lxii. Wiþ ælfādle lǣcedōm ⁊ eft hū mon sceal on þā wyrte singan ǣr hī mon nīme ⁊ eft hū mon sceal þā wyrta dōn under wēofod ⁊ ofer singan . ⁊ eft tācnu be þām hwæþer hit sīe ælfsogoþa ⁊ tācn hū þū ongitan meaht hwæþer hine mon mæg gelācnian ⁊ drencas ⁊ gebedu wiþ ǣlcre fēondes costunge. lxiii . Tācnu hū þū meaht ongitan hwæþer mon sīe on wæterælfādle . ⁊ lǣcedōm wiþ þām ⁊ gealdor on tō singanne ⁊ þæt ilce mon mæg singan on wunda.
>
> 61. A salve against *ælfcynn* and against a *nihtgenga*, and for/against those people whom the/a devil has sex with. 62. A remedy against *ælfādl*; and also how one must sing over the plants before one picks them; and also how one must put those plants under an altar and sing over them; and also signs whereby [one can tell] if it is (an) *ælfsogoða*; and signs by which you can tell whether one can remedy it, and drinks and prayers against every tribulation of the Enemy.[42] 63. Signs by which you can tell if a person is suffering *wæterælfādl*, and a remedy against it and a charm to sing over it; and one can sing the same over wounds.

40 The last letter is ill-formed and unclear.

41 Ed. in R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1972), 15; on dating see Montague Rhodes James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Peterhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), 314; collated with MS, ii f. 49r.

42 For this translation of *costung* see Audrey L. Meaney, 'The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness', in *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture*, ed. Sheila Campbell, Bert Hall and David Klausner (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 12–33, at 17–18. Cf. *DOE* s.v. *costung* §1; *contra* §2.b.ii and s.v. *fēond* §3.a.iv.

The first remedy, *Wiþ ælfcynne*, does not mention *ælfsīden*, but is textually related to remedies which do, so this too I consider in chapter 5. The contents list associates the *ælf*-ailments here with diabolical harm, and specifically *fēondes costunga*, but the distinctions drawn in the passage also imply that the two things were viewed as at least potentially different. The phenomena which seem to be associated particularly with *ælf* in these sections are nocturnal assaults by supernatural beings, internal pains and cutaneous ailments or wounds.

Ælfādl

After the remedy *Wiþ ælfcynne*, Leechbook III proceeds to describe three complex procedures 'Vvið ælfādle'. As Jolly emphasised, these include liturgical elements, and their complexity attests to the potential seriousness of *ælfādl*; but they contain no further evidence for the nature of *ælfe*, or for what clinical conditions *ælfādl* might denote.[43] Semantic perspectives are more enlightening. *Ādl* was a generic term for illness; of the possible semantic relationships between the elements of *ælfādl*, much the likeliest is the common English pattern whereby the generic results from the determiner: thus *ælfādl* is probably simply a generic term, denoting any *ādl* caused by an *ælf* or *ælfe*.[44] There is no evidence that the word's meaning was divorced from that suggested by its constituent elements.

Ælfsogoða

Among the remedies for *ælfādl*, however, are 'tācnu be þām hwæþer hit sīe ælfsogoþa' ('signs by which [to know] whether it is *ælfsogoða*'). This suggests that *ælfsogoða* was a type of *ælfādl*; it must also have been a type of *sogoða*. *Ælfsogoða* has puzzled lexicographers; the *Dictionary of Old English* offers 'disease thought to have been caused by supernatural agency, perhaps anaemia', tacitly repeating a guess in Geldner's *Untersuchungen zu ae. Krankheitsnamen* of 1908.[45] But *sogoða* itself denoted internal pains, Clark Hall defining *ælfsogoða* accordingly as 'hiccough (thought to have been caused by elves)'.[46] Moreover, the unusually specific description of symptoms by which an *ælfsogoða* can be identified almost certainly includes jaundice, and since the causal association of jaundice with liver, pancreas and bile-duct problems tends to associate it with internal pain and digestive distress, the symptoms of *ælfsogoða* are consistent with the evidence for *sogoða*.[47] *Ælfsogoða*, then, surely denoted

[43] *Popular Religion*, 159–65. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 155, claimed that '*ælfadl* . . . for reasons already given, appears to have designated cutaneous eruptions of various kinds', but I have not found those 'reasons given' in any of his works.

[44] For *ādl* see *DOE*, s.v.; Roberts, Kay and Grundy, *Thesaurus*, 1 02.08.02. On the compound's semantics see Marchand, *Word-Formation*, §§2.2.9–14, 2.3–15, at §§2.2.14.3.1–2; Carr, *Nominal Compounds*, 321–39, at 323–4.

[45] *DOE*, s.v. *ælfsogeða*. Cf. Thun, 'The Malignant Elves', 388 n. 1.

[46] Clark Hall, *Dictionary*, s.v.; cf. Hall, 'Calling the Shots', 202–3.

[47] Leon Schiff, *The Differential Diagnosis of Jaundice* (Chicago: Year Book Publishers, 1946), 219–21,

internal pains (possibly of some specific sort) caused by *ælfe*, fitting nicely with the evidence of *Gif hors ofscoten sīe* and its analogues.

That *ælfsogoða* did connote the involvement of *ælfe*, as its literal meaning would suggest, is shown by a Latin charm in one of the remedies, which begins 'Deus omnipotens pater domini nostri jesu cristi. per Inpositjonem huius scriptura expelle a famulo tuo . NOMEN . Omnem Impetuum castalidum' ('God almighty, father of our lord Jesus Christ, through the application of this writing expel from your servant, NAME, every attack of *castalides*'). *Castalides* here seems certainly to denote *ælfe* through an adaptation of the use of *dūnælfa* to gloss *castalidas nymphas*, discussed above in chapter 3, and it is striking that the exorcism shows such care to specify *ælfe* in Latin rather than simply demonising them with *daemones* or *diaboli*.[48] This charm has also been taken as evidence that *ælfe* might possess the afflicted person, the charm being seen as an exorcism.[49] This reading is possible but not required: 'Impetuum castalidum' could here mean any sort of attack (including magical ones). It seems to have been inferred from a second charm, following shortly after: 'Deus omnipotens pater domini nostri jesu cristi per Inpositionem huius scriptura et per gustum huius expelle diabolum a famulo tuo .N.' ('God almighty, father of our lord Jesus Christ, through the application of this writing and through its tasting, expel the Devil from your servant, N[AME]'). This presupposes diabolical possession. But the *impetus castalidum* and diabolical possession could have been accorded separate charms precisely because they were distinct.

Wæterælfādl

The last in Leechbook III's sequence of *ælf*-remedies, section 63, declares itself to be 'Gif mon biþ on wæterælfādl' ('if a person is suffering from *wæterælfādl* [literally "fluid-*ælf*-ailment"]'; f. 125rv). No semantic information is afforded for *wæterælfādl* by way of synonyms. It, like *ælfsogoða*, was probably a hyponym of *ælfādl*, being accorded a separate section simply because the section on *ælfādl* had grown so long. But we do have some idea about what ailment(s) *wæterælfādl* denoted. As Cameron emphasised, *wæterælfādl* might be understood in two ways: as *wæterælf-ādl* or as *wæter-ælfādl*.[50] The first interpretation implies an ailment caused by a particular species of *ælf* ('water-*ælfe*'); the second a specific variety of *ælfādl* (presumably involving symptoms associated with fluids). Both interpretations can be supported by reference to other compounds: *wæterælfen* occurs in the *ælfen* glosses discussed in chapter 3; *ælfādl* has just been discussed, and the use of *wæter-* as a modifier in Old English words for

cf. 124–7, 177; Hall, 'Calling the Shots', 203–4; cf. Meaney, 'Causes of Illness', 20.

48 See further Hall, 'Calling the Shots', 205 n. 12. Cf. the early-thirteenth-century Latin charm found on a piece of parchment inside a crucifix, which declares 'coniuro uos [MS *nos*] elphes & demones & omnia genera fantasmatis' ('I conjure you, *elphes*, *demones* and all kinds of phantasms'; ed. Christopher Wordsworth, 'Two Yorkshire Charms or Amulets: Exorcisms and Adjurations', *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 17 (1903), 377–412, at 402.

49 For example, Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, s.v. *ælf-sogoða*; Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 163–4.

50 *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 155.

illnesses is well attested.[51] Most commentators have read *wæterælf-ādl*.[52] But *wæter-ælfādl*, favoured by Bonser and apparently Cameron, is much the more plausible alternative.[53] I showed in chapter 3 that the various compounds combining *ælfen* with topographical terms are almost certainly *ad hoc* formations, and that this is probably the case for *ælfen* itself. Admittedly, the mention of *castalides* in the Latin charm against *ælfsogoða* emphasises the potential for glosses to influence Anglo-Saxon physicians, and there is some rather tangential early Middle English evidence for associating *ælfe* with bodies of water.[54] But *wæter-ælfādl* remains much better paralleled, and it is unlikely that we should envisage an Anglo-Saxon tradition of *wæterælfe*. *Wæterælfādl* must be considered another hyponym of *ælfādl*.

The remedy seems to cater for some cutaneous disorder, since it seems to prescribe a poultice for application to what in a charm it calls *benne*, *dolh* and *wund* ('wounds', 'a cut, wound, tumour' and 'a wound, sore, ulcer'); it may be possible to associate these specifically with chicken-pox or measles.[55] If so, this could provide a basis for arguing that *wæterælfādl* is a bahuvrihi compound, any associations with *ælfe* being forgotten; but, as with *ælfsogoða*, certain symptoms may simply have been taken as diagnostic of ailments caused by *ælfe*. Moreover, there is later and comparative evidence associating *ælfe* with cutaneous ailments – albeit less than there is for internal pains. The *Life of Adame and Eve*, attested uniquely in Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet.a.1 (the Vernon Manuscript), compiled around the 1390s, describing the fallen angels, comments that 'If eny mon is elve-inome othur elve-iblowe, he hit hath of the angelus that fellen out of hevene' ('If anyone is *elue-inome* or *elue-iblowe*, he has it from the angels that fell from heaven').[56] There is too little context here to be certain what *elue i-nome* and *elue i-blowe* meant, but the *Middle English Dictionary* links *elue i-blowe* with the sense 'to blow (infectious breath, poison) upon (sb.)'.[57] If so, it may also have had a sense like *blisted* ('blown upon malevolently'), as in the citation 'ȝef a man be blowyn with a foul spiritus or a false blast þat he loke lyk a mesel in his face' ('if a man be *blowyn* by a foul wind/breath or an evil *blast* so that his face looks like a leper's').[58] A similar

51 Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, s.vv. *wæterādl*, *wæterbolla*, *wætergeblǽd*, *wætersēocnes*.

52 For example, Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, s.v. *wæterælf-ādl*, amended in Alistair Campbell, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Enlarged Addenda and Corrigenda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) to *wæterælfādl*, s.v.; Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, cxxxvi; Jente, *Mythologischen Ausdrücke*, 168; Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 134, 157; Karl Schneider, 'Zu den ae. Zaubersprüchen *Wið Wennum* und *Wið Wæterælfadle*', *Anglia*, 87 (1969), 282–302, at 295, 300–1; Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 160–1; Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, 252.

53 Bonser, *Medical Background*, 162–3; Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 41.

54 See Edwards, 'Laȝamon's Elves'.

55 Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 154–5.

56 Ed. N. F. Blake, *Middle English Religious Prose* (London: Arnold, 1972), 106–7.

57 S.v. *blouen* (v. (1)) §2c. *Elue i-nome* is presumably to be understood in the same way as *elf-taken* 'seized with pain by an *elf/elves*', for which see *MED*, s.vv. *elf*, *tāken* §2b; *OED*, s.v. *take* §I.7; cf. Thomas, *Religion*, 725, on *fairy-taken*.

58 Cf. the collocation of the remedy 'For a man or womma*n* that is blisted with wikkede spiritis to do away the ache and abate the swellyng', immediately preceding a remedy for *elf-cake* in a fourteenth-century manuscript, ed. G. Henslow, *Medical Works of the Fourteenth Century* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899), 89.

collocation occurs in the Middle High German *Münchener Nachtsegen*, the hand dating from the second quarter of the fourteenth century:

> Alb mit diner crummen nasen
> Ich vorbithe dir aneblasen
> Ich vorbite dir alb ruche
> cruchen vn anehuccen[59]
>
> *Alb* with your crooked nose,
> I forbid you to blow on [people],
> I forbid you, *alb*, to give off smoke,
> to creep and to cough on [people].

The compound *alvskot(t)* could in Continental Scandinavia in the nineteenth century denote cutaneous ailments as well as internal ones, *elveblest* remaining the Norwegian term for hay fever rashes, while German traditions also associate *alpe* with cutaneous ailments.[60] This material suggests that *wæterælfādl* may have been part of a reasonably well-defined association of *ælfe* with cutaneous ailments.

WIÐ FĀRSTICE

Ælfe, then, might be identified as the cause of a variety of ailments, afflicting both people and animals. The best attested are pains within the torso. This reanalysis of our Old English *ælf*-corpus provides a new context for interpreting the text with which I opened this study, *Wið færstice*, and *Wið færstice* in turn provides a key to interpreting the cultural significance of *ælfe* in medieval texts. Although we cannot be certain that its alliterative collocation of *ēse* and *ælfe* is a traditional Old English formula, since it might in theory be a loan from rather than a cognate of the Norse formula *æsir ok álfar*, we now know at least that the conceptual collocation of *ēse* and *ælfe* was traditional. I have shown that in earlier Anglo-Saxon beliefs, *ælfe* were probably primarily or only male, which brings a special interest to the charm's collocation of *ælfe* with the female *hægtessan*. Finally, I have argued that Old English *gescoten* and *gescot* could, as well as denoting shooting and projectiles, also mean '(pained with a) sharp localised pain'.[61] These points and other observations adduced below help us to use *Wið færstice* to develop a uniquely powerful perspective on the potential roles of *ælf*-beliefs in Anglo-Saxon health and healing.

The new evidence concerning *Wið færstice* can be contextualised with thinking in medical anthropology, which has established clearly the power

[59] Lines 33–6; ed. Theodor von Grienberger, 'Der Münchener Nachtsegen', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Litteratur*, 41 (1897), 335–63, at 337–8. On dating see Edwards, 'Heinrich von Morungen', 120. I am indebted to Peter Hasler and the other members of his University of Glasgow Middle High German reading group for assistance with the interpretation of this text.

[60] Thun, 'The Malignant Elves', 387; Lid, 'Um finnskot', 38–46 *passim*; Höfler, *Deutsches Krankheitsnamen-Buch*, s.vv. *Alp*, *Elbe*.

[61] See above, p. 100; 'Getting Shot', 22–4; 'Calling the Shots', 202, 206.

of ritual, particularly in manipulating social forces with a bearing on an individual's health; of the diagnosing and concomitant naming of ailments; and of placebo and nocebo effects.[62] These perspectives are gradually being absorbed into thinking on medieval charms.[63] Less often noted is the capacity of psychological disorders to produce somatic illness: some societies, indeed, systematically conceive in somatic terms what Western clinical medicine would define as psychological disorders.[64] The focus of our Anglo-Saxon medical texts on somatic diagnoses may disguise the treatment of psychological problems, for which the psychological treatments of charm, ritual and other manipulations of belief-systems were liable to be key elements in healing.

How old *Wið fǣrstice* is is hard to judge. Commentators once considered it incoherent and fragmentary, a perspective abetted by their insistence on dissecting it into 'pagan' and 'Christian' parts.[65] However, critics of the 1970s and 1980s developed the early revisionism of Skemp to argue for its coherence of composition, a position which I accept, and will to some extent consolidate.[66] Although its origins could be disparate, *Wið fǣrstice* is a coherent text. Bredehoft has recently identified its metre as an example of what he argued to be a distinctive tradition of 'late Old English verse', but even if – as he argued – this form was a more or less lineal successor to classical Old English verse, it is a form attested already by the mid-tenth century, in the charm in *Gif mon biþ on wæterælfādl* discussed above, and could be older.[67] That *Wið fǣrstice* was composed before the end of the tenth century is hinted at by its alliteration of *gyllende* and *gāras*, showing the alliteration of palatal and velar realisations of early Old English /ɣ/, a practice which apparently declined during the tenth century, ceasing by the end; but this could arguably reflect the repetition of an inherited formula.[68] Following recent datings of the manuscript, I work here on the assumption that we are dealing with a cultural artefact of the

62 Cecil G. Helman, *Culture, Health and Illness: An Introduction for Health Professionals*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1994), esp. 196–201, 224–45, 275–85, 303–7.

63 For example, Howell D. Chickering Jr., 'The Literary Magic of *Wið Færstice*', *Viator*, 2 (1971), 83–104; John D. Niles, 'The *Æcerbot* Ritual in Context', in *Old English Literature in Context*, ed. John D. Niles (Cambridge: Brewer; Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1980), pp. 44–56; Stephen O. Glosecki, *Shamanism and Old English Poetry*, The Albert Bates Lord Studies in Oral Tradition, 2 / Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 905 (Garland: New York, 1989), esp. 101–40.

64 Helman, *Culture*, 267–71.

65 See George W. Abernethy, 'The Germanic Metrical Charms' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1983), 94–8.

66 A. R. Skemp, 'The OE Charms', *Modern Language Review*, 6 (1911), 289–301, at 289–93; Minna Doskow, 'Poetic Structure and the Problem of the Smiths in *Wið Færstice*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 12 (1976), 321–6; Stanley R. Hauer, 'Structure and Unity in the Old English Charm *Wið Færstice*', *English Language Notes*, 15 (1977–8), 250–7; L. M. C. Weston, 'The Language of Magic in Two Old English Metrical Charms', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 86 (1985), 176–86, at 177–80; cf. Chickering, 'Literary Magic', 83–104.

67 Thomas A. Bredehoft, 'Ælfric and Late Old English Verse', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 33 (2004), 77–107, at 81 n. 15; 106.

68 Ashley Crandell Amos, *Linguistic Means of Determining the Dates of Old English Literary Texts*, Medieval Academy Books, 90 (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1980), 100–2; cf. Fulk, *Meter*, 258–9; Donka Minkova, *Alliteration and Sound Change in Early English*, Cambridge Studies in Linguistics, 101 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113–21. For formulaic parallels see Introduction, n. 76.

late tenth century. Beginning by focusing on the details of the ailment and the mechanics of the healing process attested by *Wið fǣrstice*, I proceed to assess how we should understand the mythological world which it invokes, first within the text and then in Anglo-Saxon society.

The ailment

Any assessment of *Wið fǣrstice* – but particularly a medical anthropological one – is hampered by the fact that we do not know what range of symptoms *fǣrstice* connoted. *Stice* may have denoted something serious, and although *fǣr-* suggests both a sudden onset and acuteness, the pain may still have been chronic or recurrent.[69] What is clear, however, is that *Wið fǣrstice*'s central conceit is the conception of a violent, stabbing pain in terms of a projectile inflicted by supernatural beings. The concept of a supernaturally inflicted projectile lodged inside a patient is well paralleled anthropologically.[70] Moreover Colgrave and Mynors suggested that *Wið fǣrstice* has an Anglo-Saxon analogue, as early as 731, in book 5, chapter 13 of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*.[71] Bede recounts, in a generally conventional but neatly poised *exemplum*, the death of an anonymyous Mercian nobleman. Struck with a disease but too proud to repent of his sins, the man has a vision, in which two 'pulcherrimi iuuenes' ('very handsome youths') present him with a small book listing his few good deeds. They are followed by an 'exercitus malignorum et horridorum uultu spirituum' ('army of evil spirits, their faces savage'), who present him with an enormous volume listing his many sins. Aware that the man's soul is lost, the two youths disappear; 'surgentesque duo nequissimi spiritus, habentes in manibus uomeres, percusserunt me, unus in capite et alius in pede; qui uidelicet modo cum magno tormento inrepunt in interiora corporis mei, moxque ut ad se inuicen perueniunt, moriar' ('and leaping forth, two very evil spirits, holding spikes in their hands, struck me, one in the head and the other in the foot. These, in a manifest fashion, crept with great twisting into the inside of my body, and as soon as they arrive, each in turn, I will die').[72] This element in Bede's story is unusual, and derivation from traditional Anglo-Saxon culture is plausible. The *Historia ecclesiastica* was not uninfluenced by popular Christianity,[73] while the anonymity of the *exemplum*'s protagonist may hint at a legendary origin. Bede's construction of a fatal ailment as a supernaturally inflicted weapon suggests that Anglo-Saxon conceptions of illness as supernaturally inflicted weapons long predate our manuscript of *Wið fǣrstice*. In this context, we can reread the role of the prose directive which follows the charm: 'nim þonne þæt seax ādō on wǣtan' ('take then the knife; put it in the liquid'). It is impossible to be certain precisely what this phrase is intended to imply. A pragmatic reading, accepting the

69 See Introduction, n. 3.
70 Honko, *Krankheitsprojektile*; cf. Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 224–5, 236–7.
71 *Bede*, 500 n. 2.
72 Ed. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, 500; on *uomer* see n. 2; Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 223.
73 Cubitt, 'Sites and Sanctity', 60–6.

relevance of the prose recipe, would be that the healer should dip a knife into the concoction which he has just made, so as to apply it to the patient – at any rate all previous commentators seem to have thought that this *seax* is being used in healing.[74] However, the determiner *þæt* in 'þæt seax' implies that reference has already been made to the *seax*. The only other *seax* which the text mentions is that forged by the *smið*: assuming textual cohesion, 'nim þonne þæt seax ādō on wǣtan' surely means that the healer is to draw the supernaturally inflicted *seax* from the patient, and put it into liquid. Although Glosecki did not interpret the direction in this way, he did adduce parallels for *Wið fǣrstice* in North American shamanic practices of sucking magical projectiles from patients' bodies, and many more comparisons could be adduced.[75]

An earlier parallel again is Aldhelm's description of Allecto, one of the *Furiae* of Classical mythology, in lines 2635–42 of his *Carmen de virginitate*, where she stands as a metaphor for the urge to fall into anger. Although his description is otherwise conventional, it concludes by saying

> Haec solet ad bellum ferratum ducere contos
> Horrida facturos animabus vulnera sanctis,
> Nostras ni dominus mentes defendat inermes.[76]
>
> She brings iron-tipped spears to battle,
> which would cause jagged wounds to holy souls,
> if the Lord did not protect our defenceless minds.

Aldhelm did not derive this detail from his Classical sources, which have the Furies (and specifically Allecto) causing harm with their snakes.[77] Doubtless part of his inspiration lay in the injunction in Ephesians 6.16 to stand, 'in omnibus sumentes scutum fidei in quo possitis omni tela nequissimi ignea extinguere' ('in all matters taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to put out all the burning arrows of the most evil one') – a metaphor which Insular writers made their own.[78] But Allecto's *conti* here differ from the biblical *tela*: her iron-tipped spears, understood as a cause of metaphorical wounds, are reminiscent of the *īsenes dǣl* inflicted by the spears of the *hægtessan* in *Wið fǣrstice*. Moreover, the Third Cleopatra Glossary – originating in the eighth century – glosses *furiarum* in this passage with *hægtessa*, while the mention of Allecto specifically is glossed with 'wælcyrge, tessa', where the *tessa* must either be a scribal corruption of an early form **haegtessae*, or perhaps a unique English simplex attestation of *hægtesse*'s problematic second

74 Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II 259–61.

75 *Shamanism*, 18–19; cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Sorcerer and his Magic', in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson *et al*., 2 vols (London: Allen Lane, 1968–77), I pp. 167–85 (first publ. 'Le sorcier et sa magie', *Les temps modernes*, 41 (1949), 3–24), at 175–85.

76 Ed. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi opera*, 460.

77 *Aeneid* 7.323–6, ed. Fairclough, *Virgil*, II 24; *Metamorphoses* 4.451–511, ed. Miller, *Ovid*, I 210–14; cf. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 101–2. On Aldhelm's use of these sources see p. 84.

78 Ed. Weber, *Biblia sacra*, II 1814–15; cf. M. Atherton, 'The Figure of the Archer in *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon Psalter', *Neophilologus*, 77 (1993), 653–7; Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 33–5; Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 51–2.

element.[79] It would be risky to infer a direct connection between Aldhelm's poem and the beliefs attested perhaps three centuries later in *Wið fǽrstice*, but the gloss at least uses the word *hægtesse* to denote a being very like those in *Wið fǽrstice*, emphasising the charm's deep roots.

Aldhelm's metaphorical use of Allecto's *conti* provides a context for focusing finally on the *gescot* which *Wið fǽrstice* mentions. The charm leaves us in no doubt that it conceives of the cause of the patient's *fǽrstice* as a (supernatural) projectile. 'Projectile' is one of the prototypical meanings of *gescot*, so this may seem straightforward enough. But my argument that Old English *(ge)scoten* could mean 'pained' and *gescot* 'sharp pain' means that as well as denoting projectiles, *ēsa gescot*, *ylfa gescot* and *hægtessan gescot* could also denote in literal and technical language an ailment which I have shown above to be characteristic of *ælfe*. These observations add to our reading of *Wið fǽrstice* the element of an elaborate play on words. The deployment of the polysemous *scoten* and *gescot* brilliantly removes, at a linguistic level, the distinction between metaphor and reality: the individual who is *scoten* with an internal pain is at one and the same time *scoten* with a (magical) projectile; the same play on words is again attested (this time in cursing) in early-modern Scotland.[80] *Fǽrstice*, of course, is itself polysemic in this context, being equally able to denote internal pains and wounds. We are dealing in *Wið fǽrstice* with an approach to healing which not only deploys metaphor at a discursive level, but underpins it with polysemy at a lexical one. This analysis suggests that the remedy's use of vocabulary helps to bind it into a coherent composition: the terms *fǽrstice*, *scoten* and *gescot* are all polysemic, denoting not only projectile wounds but also internal pains, and are used to facilitate the text's construction of an ailment as the product of a conflict with supernatural beings. Specifically, it renarrates the sufferer's experience in martial and heroic terms. If recited only to victims of the illness, the charm had the potential to help them renegotiate their self-perception, but if intended for public performance, it could extend that renegotiation to the whole community. A similar renarration is apparent in *Gif mon biþ on wæterælfādl*, where the charm constructs what seems to be a cutaneous ailment in terms of *benne* and *beadowrǽda* ('wounds' and 'battle-bandages'). Just as it proved useful in early-medieval Christianity to posit Satan as the ultimate source of the arrows of temptation, positing supernatural beings as the source of the *fǽrstice* introduced important new players into the narratives constructed by patients, healer and their communities.

Hægtessan, *ælfe* and the smiths

Ælfe are mentioned explicitly in *Wið fǽrstice* only at the culmination of the charm, which is 'tō bōte ēsa gescotes . . . tō bōte ylfa gescotes / . . . tō bōte hægtessan gescotes' ('as a remedy for the *gescot* of *ēse* . . . as a remedy for the

[79] Ed. Rusche, 'The Cleopatra Glossaries'; on provenance see p. 82.
[80] Hall, 'Getting Shot', 22.

gescot of *ælfe* / . . . as a remedy for the *gescot* of *hægtessan*'). However, the *hægtessan* mentioned there almost certainly correspond to the beings described in the first ten metrical lines, raising the prospect that the *ælfe* might also have counterparts earlier on.[81] Denoted successively by *hȳ* ('they') and *ðā mihtigan wīf* ('the powerful women'), the *hægtessan* ride loudly over a burial mound or hill, throwing spears, to inflict, we may infer, what is called 'īsenes dǣl / hægtessan geweorc' ('a piece of iron, / the work/deed of *hægtessan*') a little later in the charm. Besides the similarity to Aldhelm's portrayal of Allecto, this motif compares well with other instances in medieval north-west European texts, both antedating and postdating *Wið fǣrstice*, of martial supernatural females riding out in groups and causing harm – arguably affording us a glimpse into the non-intellectual cultural sources for witchcraft beliefs attested in the early-modern witchcraft trials.[82] This being so, one wonders if the weapon-making *smiðas* ('craftsmen') which *Wið fǣrstice* describes correspond later to the *ēse* and *ælfe*.

The smiths were long interpreted as forces aiding the patient against the *hægtessan*, mainly because of an assumed connection between them and Weland (on whom see chapter 1 above) and a further assumption – contrary to all our major sources – that the hero Weland would not be found harming someone else.[83] However, as Doskow pointed out, identifying the smiths as a beneficial force

> raises many more questions than it answers. Why should the description in the first section of the attacking forces be interrupted by the introduction of an allied force? Why should the pattern of identification of the sources of evil be suddenly broken to identify an ally, the single smith, only to return to naming evil powers after introducing the ally?[84]

Doskow's observations are also supported by a lexical detail: the *smiðas* of *Wið fǣrstice* are portrayed as forging 'wælspera' ('slaughter-spears'), and the word *spere* is, on the four other occasions when it occurs in the charm, exclusively and formulaically identified as the cause of the ailment. Nor should we be surprised to find smiths causing harm in (Christian) Anglo-Saxon culture. As I have discussed above, the common assertion that smiths and smithing were associated with magical power in early-medieval Europe is ill-supported.[85] But Judaeo-Christian traditions reproduced in Anglo-Saxon England sometimes cast smiths in an unfavourable light.[86]

81 Hauer, seeking to link the second half of *Wið fǣrstice*'s charm intimately with the first, argued that *hȳ* denotes the *ēse* mentioned later and *ðā mihtigan wīf* the *hægtessan* ('*Wið Færstice*', 52). But it seems unlikely that two groups are described in the first ten lines, not least because 'þǣr ðā mihtigan wīf / hyra mægen berǣddon' uses the demonstrative pronoun *þā*, implying that the *mihtigan wīf* are figures which we should already know.

82 Hall, 'Continuity'.

83 See Chickering, 'Literary Magic', 100–1; Abernethy, 'Charms', 105–7; a later example is Glosecki, *Shamanism*, 134.

84 '*Wið Færstice*', 324.

85 See pp. 33–4.

86 See Coatsworth and Pinder, *The Art*, 178–203, esp. 198–203; Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 6 (Cambridge:

The fact that the *smiðas* are not explicitly called *ælfe* or *ēse* can be explained on rhetorical grounds. The supernatural women at the beginning of the charm are at first denoted only by *hȳ*, and then by the more descriptive but still euphemistic *mihtigan wīf*, creating a tension which is only resolved by their specific identification as *hægtesse* in the charm's nineteenth line. The *smiðas* can be seen as part of the same technique: a use of allusion in the first half of the text creating tension, emphasising the threat posed by the mysterious supernatural forces, which are unnamed and therefore outside human control, until the tension is resolved by their naming in a rhetorically powerful climax. This movement would parallel the charm's progression from alluding to the ailment, to metaphorically describing a 'wund swīðe' ('great injury', line 12), to focusing at last on the patient's own body, both the patient and his assailants being embodied precisely at the moment when they are exorcised. Linking *ēse* and *ælfe* with the *smiðas*, then, increases the coherence of the charm.

These hints are arguably consolidated by a remarkable parallel in the Scottish witchcraft trials, in the four confessions to witchcraft of Issobel Gowdie, tried in Nairn in 1662.[87] The evidence provided by Issobel in her sequence of four confessions is complex, and without doubt heavily influenced by seventeenth-century intellectual ideas about witchcraft. But Issobel also recounted material about *Fearrie* which commentators agree is too unusual to have come from her inquisitors; although there was a great gap of time and space between the writing of *Wið fǣrstice* and Issobel's confessions, charm-texts and related traditions were demonstrably transmitted across this gap with little alteration.[88] At various times, Issobel confessed to riding through the air on straws with her coven; shooting her victims with 'elf-arrow-heidis' or 'elf-arrows' which she acquired from the Devil, in 'the Elfes howssis', the Devil shaping them 'with his awin hand' before passing them on for finishing to 'Elf-boyes'; and visits to the king and queen of *Fearrie*. Drawing this material together to reconstruct a set of underlying concepts is problematic, but prominent in Issobel's confessions is a conception of witchcraft involving groups of witches riding out, gaining magical projectiles from the *elvis* who manufacture them, and using them to shoot people. Besides the general similarities of this material to *Wið fǣrstice*, Issobel portrayed one smith (in her account the Devil) in a group of smiths, as the charm does. The relevance of these parallels to the whole of the Old English charm consolidates literary

Cambridge University Press, 1993), 189–90.

87 Ed. Robert Pitcairn, *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland*, Maitland Club Publications, 19 / Bannatyne Club, 42, 3 vols (London and Edinburgh: The Maitland Club, 1833), III 602–16. For the arguments here see Hall, 'Continuity'.

88 The example *par excellence* is the Second Merseberg Charm, ed. Braune, *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, 89, and its later analogues (for which in England see for example Owen Davies, 'Healing Charms in Use in England and Wales 1700–1950', *Folklore*, 107 (1996), 19–32, at 26–7). For another example see Thomas D. Hill, 'The Old English Dough Riddle and the Power of Women's Magic: The Traditional Context of Exeter Book Riddle 45', in *'Via Crucis': Essays on Early Medieval Sources and Ideas in Memory of J. E. Cross*, ed. Thomas N. Hall (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002), pp. 50–60.

arguments for its coherence, and their existence shows that *Wið fǣrstice* is not a unique imaginative blooming. Issobel's use of *elf* links her narratives lexically to the history of *ælf*, and supports the inference on internal evidence that *Wið fǣrstice*'s *ælfe* are identical with its *smiðas*.

INTERPRETATIONS

Wið fǣrstice provides a paradigm for understanding how the attribution of ailments to *ælfe* – and to other supernatural beings – could have been significant in Anglo-Saxon culture. My discussion in this chapter has shown that the historiographical construct of *elf-shot* is ill-founded. What is clear, however, is that *ælfe* could cause a variety of ailments. This included cutaneous ones, but most prominent were sharp internal pains, which could afflict both livestock and people. One of the ways in which Anglo-Saxons could denote such pains was with the verb *scēotan* and the noun *gescot*, which had figurative senses, respectively along the lines of 'to pain' and 'sharp pain'. What *Wið fǣrstice* shows is that these words were at times incorporated into dramatic mythological narratives in which a *gescot* is metaphorically conceived in another of the word's senses, as a magical projectile. This strategy gave the ailment an ultimate as well as a proximate source, and created a narrative in which the healer tackled the disease at its root – neither treating merely the symptoms nor merely defending the patient against supernatural assault, but mounting a dramatic counter-offensive. Moreover, *Wið fǣrstice* re-narrates the situation of the patient as part of a heroic struggle in which he or she represents the in-group in opposition to external forces. A potentially debilitating ailment, potentially restricting the economic contribution of the sufferer to the community, is recast in martial, heroic terms as a wound. Although we lack such vivid evidence for other *ælf*-ailments, *Wið fǣrstice* suggests the significance which identifying ailments' sources as *ælfe* could have had in our other Old English medical texts – and so more widely in Anglo-Saxon culture.

Whether *ælfe* were ever supposed to use projectiles to cause illness is unclear: they are only attested in the hands of *hægtessan*; but the use of other martial metaphors for illness is apparent in *Gif mon biþ on wæterælfādl*. It is hard to judge how far the various herbal remedies for *ælf*-ailments may have been clinically effective. What is clear, however, is both that the psychological benefits of healing rituals can be significant in themselves and as facilitators of somatic healing, and that Anglo-Saxon diagnoses of somatic ailments may reflect psychological problems which would also be susceptible to ritual treatment. *Wið fǣrstice* suggests the power which beliefs in *ælfe* and similar beings could have in Anglo-Saxon healing, and help us to understand the meanings of their association with ailments in the Old English medical texts.

One would like to use *Wið fǣrstice* to situate the *ælfe* of the medical texts in relation to the models developed in chapters 2 and 3, whereby *ælfe* were characterised through linguistic and onomastic evidence as otherworldly beings – distinct from the human in-group in their supernatural character,

but associated with it in contradistinction to monsters – but through *Beowulf* as monsters themselves. Making distinctions of this sort is problematic, not least because it may be that while my models held in the relatively ideal world of myths, semantics and ideologies, their application to individual cases of supernaturally inflicted illness was less clear-cut. The prominence of female figures in *Wið fǣrstice* is also a complication: as I have discussed regarding Scandinavian culture, the position of females could be ill-defined or systematically liminal in medieval patriarchal world-views. Moreover, it is possible that the *hægtessan* of *Wið fǣrstice* were deemed potentially, like Issobel Gowdie, to be enemies from within the community. However, there is no question that *Wið fǣrstice* constructs a strong distinction between in-group (the patient and healer) and harmful out-group (the supernatural beings). The *hægtessan* at least seem to be associated with the world outside human settlements, and possibly with a burial mound.[89] This binary reading is useful: drawing particularly on the insights of Hutton and Alver and Selberg, I have read this kind of distinction in the context of the Scottish witchcraft trials to have been a powerful means of promoting solidarity between the in-group on the one hand and on the other the patient and the healer – both, for their different reasons, potentially marginalised – and we might make similar inferences for Anglo-Saxons.[90]

This being so, it is tempting to see *Wið fǣrstice* as evidence for the success of the *Beowulf* model – for the alignment of *ælfe* with monsters and demons – or at least for the diminished relevance of more subtle distinctions within the world of supernatural beings in late Anglo-Saxon culture. However, other possibilites exist, and medieval comparative evidence considered in the next chapter in particular suggests how *ælfe* could be harmful but still not monstrous. Likewise, ambivalent and dangerous though they could be, the *dísir* appear clearly in the early Scandinavian evidence on the human rather than the monstrous side of semantic fields. If they are to be read in terms of the models presented above of a tripartite division between the in-group, otherworldly beings, and monsters, then the *hægtessan*, *ælfe* and *ēse* in *Wið fǣrstice* might be expected to have inflicted the ailment in response to some transgression by the sufferer. They would in this reading exist as

[89] On burial mounds in late Anglo-Saxon culture see Sarah Semple, 'A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology*, 30 (1998–9), 109–26; 'Illustrations of Damnation in Late Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 231–45; Howard Williams, 'Monuments and the Past in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology*, 30 (1998–9), 90–108; Andrew Reynolds, 'Burials, Boundaries and Charters in Anglo-Saxon England: A Reassessment', in *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, ed. Sam Lucy and Andrew Reynolds, The Society for Medieval Archaeology, Monograph Series, 17 (London: The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2002), pp. 171–94, esp. 175–9; Alaric Hall, 'Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation, and Saint Guthlac', in *Images of Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, ed. Debra Higgs Strickland (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); preprint available at <http://www.alarichall.org.uk>.

[90] Ronald Hutton, 'The Global Context of the Scottish Witch-Hunt', in *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 16–32; Alver and Selberg, 'Folk Medicine'; Hall, 'Getting Shot', 27–8, 33.

an ordered threat to a transgressing individual. That a healer might want not only to identify an external source for a patient's illness, but to identify a yet more fundamental cause in a social transgression by his or her client should not surprise us. Such processes not only added plausibility to the healer's aetiology of an ailment, but tied healing practices into the wider negotation and upholding of social norms. Medieval saints' lives are replete with depictions of saints beginning healing by identifying a hidden moral transgression, and this reading also recalls the readiness of witnesses in early-modern witchcraft trials to expound their own misdemeanours towards the accused in order to support their claims that the accused had perpetrated witchcraft in revenge.

It is also worth, finally, noting two themes prominent in later beliefs concerning supernatural beings and illness or misfortune for which our Old English texts provide no evidence: changelings, and assisting witches. Although texts like *Vǫlundarkviða* and some of the comparative material considered in the next chapter afford circumstantial evidence for associating *ælfe* with socially unsanctioned pregnancy, no Anglo-Saxon comparisons emerge for the prominent later association of supernatural beings with changelings – replacing healthy children (or occasionally adults) with sickly or deformed ones – or even for harming children especially.[91] Our Anglo-Saxon evidence is not without mention of malformed or ailing children, and though the silence concerning changeling lore still proves nothing, we should be cautious about assuming that it already existed in early-medieval culture.[92] The idea that the children begotten on members of the in-group by otherworldly beings would be malformed is attested in England by the thirteenth century and exemplifed by the *Man of Law's* Tale, quoted below.[93] Meanwhile, associations of supernatural beings with changelings in Europe are attested back into the thirteenth century, and in Antiquity; but such associations begin to be attested for *elves* only in the fifteenth century.[94] Perhaps Anglo-Saxons had

91 See Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, *passim*; Ann Helene Bolstad Skjelbred, 'Rites of Passage as Meeting Place: Christianity and Fairylore in Connection with the Unclean Woman and the Christened Child', in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1376 (New York: Garland, 1991), pp. 215–23, at 219–21.

92 See Audrey L. Meaney, 'Women, Witchcraft and Magic in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Medicine in Early Medieval England: Four Papers*, ed. D. G. Scragg and Marilyn Deegan, corr. reissue (Manchester: Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, University of Manchester, 1989), pp. 9–40, at 20–2; Sally Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 98–100 (whose reference in n. 28 should be to Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, III 145).

93 See p. 140; cf. *De nugis curialium* ii.11, ed. James, *Walter Map*, 158–60; *Þiðreks saga*, ch. 169, ed. Henrik Bertelsen, *Þiðriks saga af Bern*, Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk Litteratur, 34, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Møller, 1905–11), I 319–22; and the rise of *elf* as a term of abuse (see *OED*, s.vv. *elf* §§2b, 3, *oaf*).

94 Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Martin Thom, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture, 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) (first publ. *Le saint lévrier: Guinefort, guérisseur d'enfants depuis le XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979)), esp. 74–82. The association of *elf* with changelings begins with its association with *lamia* in the *Promptorium parvulorum* of the 1440s, ed. Albertus Way, *Promptorium parvulorum sive clericorum: lexicon Anglo-Latinum princeps, auctore Fratre Galfrido Grammatico Dicto*, Camden Society Publications, 25, 54, 89, 3 vols (London: Camden Society, 1843–65), I 138; for later evidence see Richard Firth Green, 'Changing Chaucer', *Studies in the*

other traditional discourses handling babies' malformity or failure to thrive. Comparison with Scandinavia suggests culturally sanctioned abandonment; if so, non-Christian changeling lore might have been a response to the strong Christian opposition to abandoment.[95]

Age of Chaucer, 25 (2003), 27–52, at 41–5; cf. William Horman, *Vulgaria* (London: Pynson, 1519; repr. Oxford: Roxburghe Club 1926), 39 ('The fayre hath chaunged my childe. Strix vel lamia pro meo, suum paruulum supposuit').

95 Crawford, *Childhood*, downplayed the prospect of abandonment at p. 92, and the practice of oblation was of course generally accepted by Churchmen: see John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 228–55. But these are not necessarily exclusive of practices of abandoment. Problematic sources though they are, Ine's laws explicitly cover infanticide, along with at least one recently noted hint in an anonymous late-eleventh-century copy of an Old English homily (Graham D. Caie, 'Infanticide in an Eleventh-Century Old English Homily', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 45 (1998), 275–6; contrast Crawford, *Childhood*, 93–4). See further Boswell, *Kindness*, esp. 198–227, 256–66, and compare recent assessments of infanticide in medieval Scandinavia: Carol J. Clover, 'The Politics of Scarcity: Notes on the Sex Ratio in Early Scandinavia', *Scandinavian Studies*, 60 (1988), 147–88, at 150–72; Juha Pentikäinen, 'Child Abandonment as an Indicator of Christianization in the Nordic Countries', in *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names, Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Encounters between Religions in Old Nordic Times and Cultic Place-Names Held at Åbo, Finland, on the 19th–21st August 1987*, ed. Tore Ahlbäck (Åbo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 1990), pp. 72–91; Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 85–93; Nancy L. Wicker, 'Selective Female Infanticide as Partial Explanation for the Dearth of Women in Viking Age Scandinavia', in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Guy Halsall (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), pp. 205–21.

5

Ælfe, Illness and Healing (2): *Ælfsīden*

ÆLFSĪDEN occurs in three different remedies, each in a different collection, though of these two must be textually related: one of the two remedies in *Lācnunga* which contain *ælf* (section 29, ff. 137r–138r); section 41 of Leechbook III (ff. 120v–121r); and a related remedy in Book I of Bald's Leechbook (section 64, ff. 52v–53r). Unfortunately, the textual contexts of *ælfsīden* provide little unequivocal evidence for its meaning, while the word *sīden* occurs only in *ælfsīden*. However, *sīden* is almost certainly cognate with the Old Norse strong verb *síða* (to give a broad and advised translation, 'work magic'), and its derivatives *seiðr* (the magic worked) and *síði* (the magic-worker): it derives from the infinitive stem of *síða*'s Germanic ancestor **sīþanam*, with the deverbative nominal suffix *-en*.[1] *Síða* is, as a strong verb, *a priori* likely to have an Indo-European origin. It has phonologically and semantically convincing Indo-European cognates in Welsh *hud* ('magic'), *hudo* ('work magic, work by magic') and Lithuanian *saĩsti* ('intepret a sign, prophesy').[2] The word *síða* and probably its basic meaning originate, then, in a pre-Germanic ancestor found in other Western Indo-European languages. These words probably derive from an Indo-European root concerning binding.[3] As with *ælfādl*, discussed in the last chapter, the determiner *ælf-* in *ælfsīden* probably denotes the source of the *sīden*; if so, *ælfsīden* probably meant something along the lines of 'the magic of *ælfe*'. *Sīdsa*, also attested in an *ælf*-remedy (in Bald's Leechbook II, section 65, f. 106r), is another cognate, with the deverbative suffix *-sa*, and is accordingly considered here too.[4] I begin by analysing the texts which attest to *sīdsa* and *ælfsīden* in detail, in ascending order of complexity; I then proceed to the textually related remedy *Wið ælfcynne* (Leechbook III, section

1 For the etymology of *-en* see Voyles, *Grammar*, §7.2.26; on its semantics – which are unfortunately too varied to provide useful information – Dieter Kastovsky, 'Deverbal Nouns in Old and Modern English: From Stem-Formation to Word-Formation', in *Historical Semantics, Historical Word-Formation*, ed. Jacek Fisiak, Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs, 29 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985), pp. 221–61, at 237–8.

2 *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru / A Dictionary of the Welsh Language* (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1950–2003), s.vv. *hud1*, *hydaf*; Walther von Wüst, 'Ein weiterer idg./finnisch-ugrischer Zusammenhang?', *Ural-altaische Jahrbücher*, 26 (1954), 135–8, at 136.

3 De Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. *seið*; on the medieval association of binding with magic in the Germanic-speaking world see Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 226–31 *et passim*. For other – unconvincing – etymologies see Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd: Textstudier i nordisk religionshistoria, Nordiska texter och undersökningar*, 5 (Stockholm: Geber, 1935), 120 n. 2; Wüst, 'Zusammenhang'; Glosecki, *Shamanism*, 97; Brit Solli, *Seid: Myter, sjamanisme og kjønn i vikingenes tid* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2002), 135.

4 On *-sa* see Krahe and Meid, *Germanische Sprachwissenschaft*, III §113.3.

61, f. 123). Having re-assessed our core Old English evidence for *sīdsa* and *ælfsīden*, I then broaden the scope to draw in a comparative context: primarily Scandinavian material concerning *seiðr*, but also medieval Irish and Middle English material. This allows us to develop a sense of the narratives with which *ælfsīden* is likely to have been associated in Anglo-Saxon culture – and their possible social meanings. Finally, I advert to hints that *ælfe*'s powers were not purely negative: the word *ylfig* in particular seems to indicate that the altered mental states which *ælfe* could inflict might be linked positively with supernatural, prophetic knowledge, suggesting another side again to the significance of *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon culture.

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

Bald's Leechbook II, section 65, ff. 107v–108r: *Wið ælfe ⁊ wiþ uncūþum sīdsan*

This remedy occurs in section 65 of Bald's Leechbook II, a few remedies after *Gif hors ofscoten sīe*: 'Wið ælfe ⁊ wiþ uncūþum sīdsan gnīd myrran on wīn ⁊ hwītes rēcelses emmicel ⁊ sceaf gagātes dǣl þæs stānes on þæt wīn, drince .iii. morgenas neaht nestig oþþe .viiii. oþþe .xii.' ('Against an *ælf* [or 'against *ælfe*'[5]] and against unknown/strange/unusual *sīdsa*, crumble myrrh into wine and the same amount of white frankincense and shave a piece of the stone *gagātes* [jet] into that wine, drink [on] three mornings, fasting [at] night, or nine or twelve'). The main evidence here for the meanings of *ælf* is its collocation with *uncūþ sīdsa*. For the meanings of *sīdsa*, we have only the evidence of its cognates to go on. What is interesting is that the text includes *uncūþ sīdsa* without referring to some more ordinary *sīdsa*. While this may imply that a *cūþ sīdsa* would require a different remedy, a more elegant explanation would be to assume that the *cūþ sīdsa* was already implicit in the text in its mention of *ælf*, the text to be interpreted as 'against an *ælf* (no doubt using *sīdsa*) but also against *sīdsa* of an unknown source'. If so, then *sīdsa* was connoted by *ælf*, but this inference is not secure enough to be relied upon. Kitson suggested that 'the wine, myrrh and frankincense surely bespeak ultimate foreign origin for all that the "elf" may imply assimilation to native tradition': we have here cultural elements drawn from ecclesiastical contexts being deployed here to meet problems denoted by older, vernacular words.[6]

Lācnunga, section 29, ff. 137r–138r

The first remedy attesting to *ælfsīden*, in *Lācnunga*, opens with 'Þis is sē hālga drænc wið ælfsīdene ⁊ wið eallum fēondes costungum' ('This is the holy/blessed drink against *ælfsīden* and against all the tribulations of the

[5] Although *uncūþum sīdsan* is in the dative, the case taken by *wið* in Royal 12 D. xvii varies, such that *ælfe* could be an accusative plural.

[6] 'Eastern Learning', 61; cf. Jolly, *Popular Religion*, esp. 153–4.

Enemy').[7] *Ælfsīden* is associated here with *fēondes costunga*, mirroring the identical association for the remedies *wið ælfādl* in Leechbook III (chapter 4). The pairing again suggests that the two threats were similar enough that one remedy could cater for both, but could hint at the same time that they were not synonymous. The remedy in *Lācnunga* almost entirely comprises liturgical ritual, which is consistent with other *ælf*-remedies, but there is no further indication of what *ælfsīden* might denote.[8] The organisation of *Lācnunga* is too irregular for any secure inferences to be made from the manuscript context.

Leechbook III, section 41, ff. 120v–121r: *lenctenādl*, and *eluesce wehte*

Leechbook III's remedy mentioning *ælfsīden* falls in section 41, which advertises itself in the contents list on folio 110r to be 'Wiþ ealle fēondes costunga drenc ⁊ sealf' ('A drink and a salve against all the tribulations of the Devil'); likewise the section opens with 'Vvrc gōdne drenc wiþ eallum fēondes costungum' ('Make a good drink against all the tribulations of the Devil'). The second remedy of those included in this section is slightly more limited in its application:

> Wyrc gōde sealfe wiþ fēondes costunga . bisceop wyrt . elehtre . harasprecel . strēawberian wīse. sīo clufihte wenwyrt eorðrima. brēmbel æppel . polleian . wermōd . gecnūa þā wyrta ealle āwylle on gōdre buteran wring þurh clāð sete under wēofod singe .viiii. mæssan ofer smire þone man mid on þā þunwonge. ⁊ bufan þām ēagum ⁊ ufan þæt hēafod . ⁊ þā brēost ⁊ under þām earmum þā sīdan . Þēos sealf is gōd wiþ ǣlcre fēondes costunga ⁊ ælfsīdenne ⁊ lenctenādle.
>
> Make a good salve against the tribulations of the Enemy: ?hibiscus, ?lupin, viper's bugloss, strawberry-stalk, the cloved lesser celendine, *eorðrima*, blackberry, pennyroyal, wormwood, pound all those plants; boil in good butter; strain through a cloth; place under the altar; sing nine masses over them; then smear the person with it generously on the temples, and above the eyes and on the top of the head and the breast and under the arms. This salve is good against each tribulation of the Enemy and *ælfsīden* and Lent-illness.

As I discuss below, this must be textually related to *Wið ælfcynne* which occurs later in Leechbook III, and more distantly to the remedy *Wiþ ælcre lēodrūnan* in Bald's Leechbook examined next. The final sentence is most illuminating, associating *ælfsīden* not only with the now-familiar *fēondes costung*, but with *lenctenādl* ('Lent-illness'). More clearly than in the *Lācnunga* text, these different sources of harm seem probably to be complementary rather than synonymous, as 'ǣlcre fēondes costunga' ('each of the tributations of the devil') ought to include all properly diabolical threats, *lenctenādl* occurring elsewhere without being associated with the Devil.

Lenctenādl affords additional perspectives on *ælfsīden*. It seems certainly to denote fevers, inferred by Cameron, mainly from the association with spring,

[7] Ed. Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 108.
[8] For liturgical content see Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 140–2.

to be forms of tertian malaria.[9] The association is bolstered by the preceding section, a short remedy 'Wiþ þon þe mon sīe mōnaþsēoc nim mereswīnes fel wyrc to swipan swing mid þone man sōna bið sēl . amen' ('For when a person is epileptic / made mad by the moon: take dolphin's skin, make it into a whip, beat the person with it; he will be well immediately, amen'; f. 120r), while the next remedy in section 41 is 'Gif þū wilt lācnian gewitsēocne man' ('If you want to minister to a mentally ill person'). These contexts amplify *Wyrc gōde sealfe*'s association of *ælfsīden* with fever, insofar as both involve altered mental states. Some later English evidence points in the same direction. A short charm in the fifteenth-century BL MS Sloane 2584 begins 'Co*n*iuro vos demones & lat*r*o*n*es elphos & morbu*m* caducu*m* vt no*n* h*ab*eatis potestate*m* noc*e*r*e* hu*n*c familiu*m* dei. N.' ('I conjure you, demons and thieves, elves and the falling sickness [i.e. epilepsy]'; ff. 73v–74r). This by no means equates elves and epilepsy, but does choose to juxtapose them and use the same charm for both. Likewise, in the roughly contemporary MS Sloane 963, the fragmentary folios 15r–16v present a series of charms prominently featuring *demones* and *Elfae* (here Latinising with a feminine rather than a masculine form).[10] Though no more explicit than Sloane 2584, one of the more prominent associations of these beings is with fevers: one charm is 'vt maledicte Elfe vel febres no*n* h*ab*eant potestate*m*' ('that neither cursed *Elfae* nor fevers have power'; f. 15r) to harm; others are 'oraciones cont*ra* om*n*es demones & cont*ra* . . . frigora & febres & elfas & omn*i*a mala' ('prayers against all demons and against . . . chills and fevers and *elfae* and all evils'; f. 16r) – including an effort to defend 'ab potestate & vexac*i*one & illusione demonu*m* & elfar*um*' ('against the power and harassment and illusion of *demones* and *elfae*'; f. 16v).

Another source of evidence for an association of *ælfe* with symptoms associated with fever can be adduced from outside the medical texts, from our unique Old English attestation of the adjective *ælfisc*, whose reflex *elvish* is well attested in Middle English, as is its counterpart and possible cognate *elbisch* in Middle High German. Old English *ælfisc* is attested, in Kentish form, only in a late-twelfth-century section of a German manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 83.[11] The word occurs on folio 397v in a note to chapter 52 of Fulgentius's *Expositio sermonum antiquorum ad grammaticum Calcidium*, an explanation of the verb *alucinare*. Helm's critical edition gives Fulgentius's text as

> Alucinare dicitur uana somniari tractum ab alucitas quos nos conopes dicimus, sicut Petronius Arbiter ait: 'Nam centum uernali me alucitae molestabant'.
>
> *Alucinare* ['to wander in mind, speak while in such a state'][12] is said [when] foolish things are (day)dreamt. Derived from *alucitae* [attested only in this passage, and

9 *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 10–11.

10 Cf. Kieckhefer, *Magic*, 70.

11 Madan Falconer *et al.*, *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford which have not hitherto been catalogued in the Quarto Series*, corr. repr., 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895–1953), II 981–2 [no. 5194]). For this section see more fully Hall, 'Elves on the Brain' , pp. 224–33.

12 An apparently unique variant on *alucinor*, but doubtless of the same meaning.

> assumed to have the meaning 'gnats, mosquitos' implied here], which we call *conopes* [i.e. κώνωπες, gnats]. Thus Petronius Arbiter affirms: 'for a hundred *alucitae* would bother me in the spring'.[13]

However, Junius 83's text is rather different, and the quotation from Petronius corrupt:

> alucinare dicitur uana somniare. tractum ab alucitis quos cenopos dicimus. sicut petronius arbiter vernalia mã inquid mã lucite molestabant. Hos Galli Eluesce wehte uocant.[14]

> *Alucinare* is said [meaning] 'to (day)dream foolish things'. Derived from *alucitae*, which we call *cenopi* [not a real word]. Thus Petronius Arbiter said 'vernal things . . . would bother'. The *Galli* call these [the *cenopi*] *Eluesce wehte* [*ælfisc* beings].

Our text, then, declares *conopes* to be called *Eluesce wehte*. Although *conops* means 'gnat', it is unlikely that the glossator understood this obscure (and, in the manuscript, corrupt) word. Almost certainly he, like the Harley Glossator, who glossed *conopes* with 'alucinaria' ('hallucinations') and 'uana somniaria' ('foolish (day)dreams'), took *conops*, not *alucita*, as the word requiring a gloss, and took it to denote delusions and dreams rather than mosquitos.[15] The gloss *Eluesce wehte* probably interprets *conops* in the same way, thus meaning something like 'delusory beings; delusions'.

Although the phrase *eluesce wehte* remains somewhat problematic, the implication is that *ælfe* were sufficiently closely associated with causing delusion that a derived adjective could be used with a meaning along the lines of 'delusory' by a glossator seeking to elucidate a Latin term. This conclusion is supported by Middle English evidence, particularly the statement in a sermon in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 649 of 1421×22 that 'non est fiducia nec mundi stabilitas in mundi gloria: mundi honor est a sliper þinge and an elvich' ('there is neither assurance nor worldly stability in worldly glory: worldly fame is *a treacherous and "elvich" thing*'), where *elvich* seems most unlikely to mean 'to do with elves' or any such literal reading, but rather to mean 'delusory'.[16] Telling in itself, the evidence of *eluesce wehte* also emphasises that *ælfe*'s capacity to inflict mind-altering ailments could be assumed in discourses quite separate from medical writings. Further parallels to *Wyrc gōde sealfe* are afforded by the gloss-word *ylfig* and the plant-name *ælfþone* considered below, but these differ from *ælfisc* in appearing to attest to positive rather than negative aspects of *ælfe*'s mind-altering powers.

Wyrc gōde sealfe associates *ælfsīden* both with diabolical malice and fevers, but it is not necessarily identical with either. Wider evidence, however, does consolidate the remedy's implication that *ælfe* might be associated with causing delusion or hallucination characteristic of fever.

13 Ed. Rvdolfvs Helm, *Fabii Planciadis Fvlgentii V.C. opera* (Lipsiae: Teubner, 1898; repr. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1970), 124–5.
14 Ed. Steinmeyer and Sievers, *Die althochdeutschen Glossen*, II 162.
15 Ed. Oliphant, *Glossary*, 109 [C1979]; collated with MS, f. 45r.
16 Ed. Roy M. Haines, '"Our Master Mariner, Our Sovereign Lord": A Contemporary View of Henry V', *Mediaeval Studies*, 38 (1976), 85–96, at 92.

Bald's Leechbook I, section 64, f. 52v: the semantics of *lēodrūne* and the association of *ælfe* with *maran*

Section 64 of Book I of Bald's Leechbook contains, in the words of the contents list on folio 5r, 'Læcedōmas wiþ ǣlcre lēodrūnan ⁊ ælfsīdenne þæt is fēfercynnes gealdor ⁊ dūst ⁊ drencas ⁊ sealf ⁊ gif sīo ādl nētnum sīe. ⁊ gif sīo ādl wyrde mannan oððe mare rīde ⁊ wyrde seofon ealles cræfta' ('Prescriptions against every *lēodrūne* and *ælfsīden*, being a charm, powder, drinks and a salve, for fevers; and if the illness should be upon livestock; and if the illness should happen to a person or a *mære* should ride and happen; in all, seven remedies'). The remedies themselves begin on folio 52v with 'Wiþ ǣlcre yfelre lēodrūnan ⁊ wið ælfsīdenne þis gewrit' ('Against each evil *lēodrūne* and against *ælfsīden*, this writing'). As I discuss in more detail below, the third of the remedies is, as Meaney pointed out, almost identical to a salve 'wið nihtgengan' ('against a night-walkers' – whatever this means) which comprises section 54 of Leechbook III (f. 122v), and the two of these are themselves reminiscent enough of *Wið ælfcynne* and *Wiþ fēondes costunga* in Leechbook III to suggest further textual interrelationships.[17] The section may have been part of Bald's Leechbook at its compilation, but its unusual preoccupation with supernatural causes of illness can be taken to suggest that it is a later addition.[18] Another context for section 64 arises from its manuscript context: it occurs in a sequence of remedies concerned with fever and mental illness: section 62 is 'wiþ fēferādle' ('against fever-illness'); 63 'wið fēondsēocum men' (presumably 'for a diabolically possessed person', though conceivably 'against a diabolically possessed person'); 65 'wið lenctenādl' ('against *lenctenādl*'); and 66 'ungemynde' ('for one out of his mind'). This provides a context of interrelated symptoms in which to understand *ælfsīden*, which are consistent with the evidence of the other attestations of *ælfsīden*, which I have just considered.

Within the remedy, meanwhile, the word *lēodrūne* is also problematic, occurring in this form only here in Old English. Its second element has been understood to denote a female supernatural being – as in some words it assuredly does – but, reassessing the evidence, Fell argued that *lēodrūne* is a variant of the poetic Old English *lēoðurūn* ('sung mystery').[19] Her case has gaps, but these can be filled.[20] *Lēoðurūn* denotes Christian holy mysteries, and Laȝamon's *lēod-rūne* prophecies. Its connotations do not appear to have been inherently negative: the potency of an *yfel lēodrūne* perhaps lay in the cursing

17 'Bald's *Leechbook*', 239.

18 Nokes, 'Bald's *Leechbook*', 66.

19 'Runes', 206–8.

20 The first element is, on phonological grounds, ostensibly the intensifying prefix derived from *lēod* ('man'; see Kastovsky, 'Semantics', 356–7) – so the *MED*, s.v. *lēde* §2c. But Fell's connection with *lēoðurūn*, foreshadowed by Cockayne's translations 'rune lay' and 'pagan charm' (*Leechdoms*, II 15, 139), does work phonologically. For the variable loss of unstressed high vowels in relevant positions see Hogg, *Grammar*, §§6.21; *-rūn~-rūne* variation is common (cf. Campbell, *Grammar*, §§592e, 619.4); and there is some evidence for */(VV)θr/ > /(VV)dr/ in West Saxon, accounting for the *d* of *lēodrūne*: Campbell, *Grammar*, §422; Hogg, *Grammar*, §7.11.

power of ill-boding prophecies attested in comparable cultures.[21] *Ælfsīden* presumably denoted something broadly similar to *lēodrūne*, a conclusion which is consonant with the meanings of 'magic' suggested for *sīden* by its Norse cognate *seiðr*. It might afflict both people and livestock.

Section 64 concludes with a remedy 'Gif mon mare rīde . genim elehtran ⁊ gārlēac . ⁊ betonican . ⁊ rēcels bind on næsce hæbbe him mon ⁊ he gange inon þās wyrte' ('If a *mære* should ride a person: take ?lupin and garlic and betony and incense; bind in fawn-skin; the person should have this on him and he should walk ?in these plants' (i.e. 'wearing these plants', reading innon)). I have analysed our other Old English evidence for the semantics of *mære* elsewhere: the clearest evidence for its meanings is afforded by the seventh-century gloss *incuba: mære*.[22] The lemma *incuba* is almost unique, which along with circumstantial evidence allows us confidently to source this gloss to a copy of Isidore's *Etymologiae* related to the Anglo-Saxon epitome of Isidore's *Etymologiae* edited by Lapidge, which gives *incuba* for Isidore's *incubus*.[23] Here, *incuba* denotes a supernatural being, implicitly female, which presses down on or rapes people. This is consistent with the cognate, later and etymological evidence for *mære*, and this kind of concept presumably underlies the riding *mære* in Bald's Leechbook. What led to the inclusion of *mære* in section 64 is not clear on internal evidence. I turn to this question below, but here I wish to note comparative evidence which shows the collocation of *ælf* and *mære* to have been well established and widespread in the West Germanic-speaking world – associations no doubt underlying the equivalence of Modern English *nightmare* with German *Alptraum* ('nightmare', lit. '*alp*-dream'). To quote only from the most impressive example, the fourteenth-century *Münchener Nachtsegen*,

> alb vnde ł elbelin
> Ir sult nich beng' bliben hin
> albes svestir vn vatir
> Ir sult uz varen obir dē gatir
> albes mutir trute vn mar
> Ir sult uz zu dē virste varē
> Noc mich dy mare druche
> Noc mich dy trute zciche
> Noc mich dy mare rite
> Noc mich dy mare bescrite
> Alb mit diner crummen nasen
> Ich vorbithe dir aneblasen. . .[24]

[21] For early Ireland see Sjöblom, *Taboos*, 111–44; for medieval Iceland Catharina Raudvere, '*Trolldómr* in Early Medieval Scandinavia', in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages*, by Karen Jolly, Catharina Raudvere and Edward Peters, The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, 3 (London: Athlone, 2002), pp. 73–171, 90–7; cf. for Anglo-Saxon England Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 98–9; John D. Niles, 'The Problem of the Ending of *The Wife's Lament*', *Speculum*, 78 (2003), 1107–50, at 1112–40.

[22] Hall, 'The Evidence for *maran*', §3.

[23] 'Epitome', p. 200.

[24] Lines 23–38, ed. Grienberger, 'Nachtsegen', 337–8. Otherwise, see for English the *South English Legendary*, discussed below, pp. 141–2, and lines 65–9 of Rowll's *Cursing*. For the Continent see the citations in Verwijs, Verdam and Stoett, *Woordenboek*, s.vv. *ALF, (III) MARE*; Edwards,

> *alb*, or also *elbelin* [little *alb*],
> you shall remain no longer (reading *lenger*)
> *alb*'s sister and father,
> you shall go out over the gate;
> *alb*'s mother, *trute* [female monster] and *mar*,
> you shall go out to the roof-ridge!
> Let the *mare* not oppress me,
> let the *trute* not ?pinch me (reading *zücke*),
> let the *mare* not ride me,
> let the *mare* not mount me!
> *Alb* with your crooked nose,
> I forbid you to blow on [people]. . .

As here, the German material also associates *mare* with the verb *riten*, suggesting the traditionality of this collocation in *Gif mon mare rīde*.[25]

While this section of Bald's Leechbook, then, tells us little that is concrete, it consolidates and extends the associations of *ælfsīden* in ways which are well contextualised, providing an important basis for comparison with fuller narratives from other medieval cultures below.

Leechbook III, section 61, f. 123: *Wið ælfcynne*

The word *ælfcynn* occurs only in section 61 of Leechbook III, at the head of the *ælfādl* remedies analysed in the previous chapter. Although it does not attest to *ælfsīden*, it is, as I show below, textually related to remedies which do, and so it is appropriate to consider it here:

> Wyrc sealfe wið ælfcynne ⁊ nihtgengan ⁊ þām mannum þe dēofol mid hæmð . genim ēowohumelan . wermōd bisceopwyrt . elehtre . æscþrote . beolone . hārewyrt. haransprecel. hæþbergean wīsan . croplēac . gārlēac . hegerifan corn . gyþrife . finul . Dō þās wyrta on ān fæt sete under wēofod sing ofer .viiii. mæssan āwyl on buteran ⁊ on scēapes smerwe dō hāliges sealtes fela on āsēoh þurh clāð. weorp þā wyrta on yrnende wæter . Gif men hwilc yfel costung weorþe oþþe ælf oþþe nihtgengan. smire his andwlitan mid þisse sealfe ⁊ on his ēagan dō and þær him sē līchoma sār sīe. ⁊ rēcelsa hine ⁊ sēna gelōme his þing biþ sōna sēlre.
>
> Make a salve against *ælfcynn* and a *nihtgenga* and for/against those people whom the/a devil has sex with: take ?hops, wormwood, ?hibiscus, ?lupin, vervain, henbane, *hārewyrt*, viper's bugloss, stalk of whortleberry, ?crow garlic, garlic, seed of goose-grass, cockle and fennel. Put these plants in a vessel, place under

'Heinrich von Morungen', 17–21. The words are associated in Norse only in the Swedish *Sjælinna thrøst*, ed. Sam Henning, *Siælinna thrøst: første delin aff the bokinne som kallas Siælinna thrøst*, Samlingar utgivna av Svenska Fornskift-sällskapet, 59 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1954), 23, which is from the Low German *Der grossen Seelentrost*, ed. Margarete Schmitt, *Der grosse Seelentrost: Ein niederdeutsches Erbauungsbuch des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Niederdeutsche Studien, 5 (Köln: Böhlau, 1959), 17.

[25] The only other Anglo-Saxon evidence for this sort of concept is a charm in a remedy 'Wið dweorg', which comprises section 93 of the *Lācnunga* (f. 167; ed. Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 160–2). The difficulties of this charm are legion, and some, particularly ambiguities of its syntax and its heavy emendation in the manuscript, have been glossed over hitherto (but see esp. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 151–3). But the charm definitely conceives of the ailment(s) in terms of a being (*wiht*) treating the sufferer as its horse (*hæncgest*). How fully it develops this concept is open to question, but it certainly shows that a vivid conceptualisation of a supernatural being riding a sick person like a horse may underlie *gif mon mare rīde*.

> an altar, sing 9 masses over them; boil in butter and in sheep's fat; put in plenty of holy salt; strain through a cloth. Throw the plants into running water. If any evil tribulation or an *ælf* or *nihtgengan* happens to a person, smear his face with this salve and put it on his eyes and where his body is sore / in pain, and burn incense about him and sign [with the cross] often; his problem will soon be better.

The unique compound *ælfcynn* offers no evidence in itself. Old English *-cynn* was productive and compounded with a wide range of words – words for people, peoples, monsters, animals, plants and diseases – and the Norse *álfkunnr*, *álfkunnigr* and *álfakyn* discussed in chapter 1 could be independent formations.[26] However, it is at least clear that *ælfcynn* implies *ælfe* themselves, since the end of the remedy specifies the prospect of an *ælf*. Jolly asserted that 'the salve works with incense and the sign of the cross to drive or smoke the elf out', but while this inference of possession is possible, it is not to be assumed.[27]

In *Wið ælfcynne*, *ælf* and *ælfcynn* are collocated with *nihtgengan*. Beyond its literal sense 'night-walkers' the meanings of this word are largely unknown; perhaps tellingly, when the word appears in chapter 1 of the *Old English Herbarium* (generally thought to have been composed in the late tenth century), it does so as a translation of 'nocturnas ambulationes' ('nocturnal wanderings'), alongside 'egeslicum gesihðum ⁊ swefnum' ('terrifying visions and dreams', translating 'visus timendos', 'terrifying visions').[28] *Þā menn þe dēofol mid hæmð* is also ambiguous: it could denote the victims of rape by the Devil or devils, or it could denote people who, by willingly having sex with devils or the Devil, gain powers to do harm.[29] If the latter, it is a singularly early attestation of a concept which became common only in the early-modern period, but as I suggest below, it could reflect popular ideas to some degree and the possibility should not be ignored. The syntax would be the smoother if we take *wiþ* in the same sense, 'against', throughout the sentence, in which case 'wið . . . þām monnum þe dēofol mid hæmð' ('against . . . those people whom the Devil/a devil beds') implies that it is the *menn* who are a threat. But if any function of the remedy from those listed at the end corresponds to the function stated at the beginning, it would be the *yfel costung*, suggesting that the *dēofol* in the first sentence is assaulting victims – in which case the remedy is for and not against the *menn*. Whatever *þā menn þe dēofol mid hæmð* means, however, its collocation with *ælfcynne* recalls *ælfe*'s association with seduction.

The value of *Wið ælfcynne* is increased by its relationship with three other texts, already mentioned. I quote *Wið ælfcynne* once more, followed by its three relatives. Words shared between *Wið ælfcynne* and *Wiþ fēondes costunga* are **emboldened**; those shared between *Wið ælfcynne* and the other two are <u>underlined</u>.

[26] *DOE*, s.v. *cynn*.
[27] *Popular Religion*, 159.
[28] Ed. De Vriend, *The Old English Herbarium*, 103–4.
[29] *Hæmð* must be singular (the expected plural being *hæmmaþ*), precluding J. Crawford's 'elves and evil spirits of the night and women who lie with the devil' in 'Evidences for Witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon England', *Medium Aevum*, 32 (1963), 99–116, at 110.

1. Leechbook III, section 61, f. 123r, *Wið ælfcynne*:
Wyrc sealfe wið ælfcynne ⁊ nihtgengan ⁊ þām mannum þe dēofol mid hæmð . genim ēowohumelan . **wermōd bisceopwyrt** . **elehtre** . æscþrote . beolone. hārewyrt. **haransprecel**. **hæþbergean wīsan** . croplēac . gārlēac . hegerifan corn. gyþrife. finul. Dō þās wyrta on ān fæt **sete under wēofod sing ofer .viiii. mæssan āwyl on buteran** ⁊ on scēapes smerwe dō hāliges sealtes fela on āsēoh **þurh clāð**. weorp þā wyrta on yrnende wæter . Gif men hwilc yfel **costung** weorþe oþþe **ælf** oþþe nihtgengan. **smire** his andwlitan mid þisse sealfe ⁊ on his **ēagan** dō and þær him sē līchoma sār sīe. ⁊ rēcelsa hine ⁊ sēna gelōme his þing biþ sōna sēlre.

2. Leechbook III, section 41, f. 120rv, *Wiþ fēondes costunga*:
Wyrc gōde **sealfe wiþ** fēondes **costunga** . **bisceopwyrt** . **elehtre** . **haransprecel** . strēaw**berian wīse** . sīo clufihte wenwyrt eorðrima . brēmbelæppel . polleian . **wermōd** . gecnūa þā wyrta ealle ā**wylle on** gōdre **buteran** wring **þurh clāð sete under wēofod singe . viiii . mæssan** ofer **smire** þone man mid on þā þunwonge . ⁊ bufan þām **ēagum** ⁊ ufan þæt hēafod . ⁊ þā brēost ⁊ under þām earmum þā sīdan . þēos sealf is gōd wiþ ælcre fēondes **costunga** ⁊ **ælf**sīdenne ⁊ lenctenādle .

3a. Leechbook III, section 54, f. 122v:
Wyrc sealfe wið nihtgengan . wyl on buteran elehtran . hegerifan . bisceopwyrt . rēademagþan . croplēac . sealt smire mid him bið sōna sēl .

3b. Bald's Leechbook I, section 64, f. 52v (from *Wiþ ælcre lēodrūnan ⁊ ælfsīdenne*):
Sealf elehtre hegerife bisceopwyrt þā rēadan magoþan . armelu . croplēac . sealt wyl on buteran to sealfe smire on þæt hēafod ⁊ þā brēost

Although some of the correlations noted are more striking than others, there is little in 3a which is not represented in 1. 3b's greater divergence is consistent with its appearance in another collection; although it does not mention *nihtgengan*, it does parallel *Wið ælfcynne* insofar as all the remedies in the section from which it comes are 'wiþ ælcre lēodrūnan ⁊ ælfsīdenne'. Both of these remedies are, then, for ailments associated with *ælf*. The comparison of 3b with the other texts is also strengthened by its description in the contents list (folio 5): 'Lǽcedōmas wiþ ælcre lēodrūnan ⁊ ælfsīdenne þæt is fēfercynnes gealdor ⁊ dūst ⁊ drencas ⁊ sealf ⁊ gif sīo ādl nētnum sīe' ('remedies against every *lēodrūne* and *ælfsīden*, being a charm for fevers, and powder and drinks and a salve; and [one] if the ailment be on cattle'). Although it is not certain, it is likely here that *fēfercynnes* refers not only to the noun immediately following it, but to all four of *gealdor*, *dūst*, *drencas* and *sealf*. If so, then 3b's function is to cure fever, which is similar to the power of 2 against *lenctenādl*. Although the verbal similarities between texts 1 and 2 are less extensive, the two remedies also share content without verbal similarity, in being concerned both with the Devil/devils, and both recommending the application of the salve to the face (respectively referred to with *andwlita* and *þunwong*).

It is impossible to establish a traditional text-critical stemma for texts like these, because the variation between them is due to free recomposition rather than mechanical errors. This makes it hard to assign priority to one text. While it is possible to imagine two different redactors excerpting material from a text like 1, it is simpler to suppose that 1 is a conflation of 2 and 3a; but we cannot be certain. However, the texts do afford a nexus of interrelationships

associating not only *ælfsīden*, *fēondes costunga* and *lenctenādl*, but also *ælfcynn*, *ælf, nihtgenga* and *þā menn þe dēofol mid hæmþ*, and, by implication, *fēfercynn*, *lēodrūne* and *mære* too. The implication that one man's *ælfsīden* might be another man's *ælf* suggests that *ælfsīden* did indeed imply the agency of *ælfe*. The list of associations for *ælfsīden* implied by these texts is, moreover, reminiscent of another list of ailments, in another remedy against *nihtgengan* / a *nihtgenga* from section 1 of Leechbook III (f. 111). Following a remedy 'Wiþ swīþe ealdum hēafod ece' ('For a very old headache') derived from the *De medicamentis* of Marcellus Empiricus, the text adds that the amulets which the remedy involves 'bēoþ gōde wiþ hēafodece ⁊ wiþ ēagwærce ⁊ wiþ fēondes costunga ⁊ nihtgengan ⁊ lenctenādle ⁊ maran ⁊ wyrtforbore ⁊ malscra ⁊ yflum gealdorcræftum' ('are good against headache and against eye-pain and against the tribulations of the Devil and *nihtgengan* / a *nihtgenga* and *lenctenādl* and *maran* / a *mære* and plant-restraint[30] and enchantments and evil incantational techniques').[31] Whatever *nihtgengan* are, their company here is like that found in the cluster of texts relating to *Wið ælfcynne*: magic, *fēondes costunga*, *lenctenādl* and *maran*. Even the *ēagwærc* has some noteworthy parallels in later English *elf*-texts.[32]

Some conclusions so far

Elliptical though our texts are, they provide some reasonably clear evidence for the meanings of *ælfsīden* and *sīdsa*. Their denotations, admittedly, remain obscure; the collocation of *ælfsīden* with *yfel lēodrūne*, however, consolidates the implication of *sīden*'s cognates that it denoted some kind of magic. *Ælfsīden* might afflict people or livestock. Previous assumptions that it involved possession or some physical assault by *ælfe* are by no means ruled out, but are also without foundation. What we can say is that the ailments with which *ælfsīden* is particularly associated are varieties of fever, particularly *lenctenādl*. This is consistent with the meanings of the word *ælfisc* in its

30 Perhaps 'binding through magical use of plants'; cf. Meaney, 'Causes of Illness', 22–4; Jente, *Mythologischen Ausdrücke*, 310.

31 For provenance see Grattan and Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, 37–8.

32 *Wið ælfcynne* has its salve applied to the eyes, and *elfae* seem to be associated with eye-pain in Sloane 963, mentioned above. On folio 14v a remedy 'ffor akynge of eyen' concludes a short collection of remedies. On the next folio (still within the same gathering), a different hand presents the series of *orationes* which mention *Elfae*, entitling it 'Aliud carmen p*ro* eodem' ('another charm against the same'): it appears that the remedy 'ffor akynge of eyen' prompted someone to include these as remedies for that ailment, and the prospect that eye-pains were associated with attacks by *elves* would provide a neat explanation. They would perhaps relate to Annette Lassen's argument for the association of good sight with power and masculinity in medieval Scandinavian culture: 'Hǫðr's Blindness and the Pledging of Óðinn's Eye: A Study of the Symbolic Value of the Eyes of Hǫðr, Óðinn and Þórr', in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference, 2–7 July 2000, University of Sydney*, ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 2000), pp. 220–8; accessed from <http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/medieval/saga.html>, 20 May 2006; cf. Carolyne Larrington, '"What Does Woman Want?" *Mær* und *Munr* in *Skírnismál*', *Álvíssmál*, 1 (1992), 3–16, at 8–12; accessed from <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~alvismal/>, 20 May 2006.

Old English attestation. Like other assaults on the health by *ælfe*, *ælfsīden* is associated but not synonymous with diabolical tribulations, attesting again to the uneasy, incomplete alignment of *ælfe* with demons in ninth- to tenth-century Anglo-Saxon clerical culture. The association, through the related text *Wið ælfcynne*, of *ælfsīden* with devils or the Devil having sex with people is a rare and intriguing one, but too ambiguous to develop. *Ælfsīden* is also associated with *nihtgengan* and with the riding of the sick by *maran*. These associations are more susceptible to analysis, since they have a ready range of comparisons in chronologically and culturally proximate sources. These provide a context for interpreting *ælfsīden* which is at once consonant with the comparative linguistic evidence that it denotes some kind of magic and with the evidence for *ælfe* as human-like otherworldly beings. I consider first Scandinavian, then Irish and then Middle English evidence, focusing in each case on a particular text: Snorri Sturluson's account, in his *Ynglinga saga*, of the interactions between King Vanlandi and his one-time liaison with Drífa; the seduction of Cú Chulainn by Fand in the Old Irish *Serglige Con Culainn*; and the description of the *elvene* in the *South English Legendary*.

COMPARATIVE EVIDENCE

Seiðr

Scandinavian evidence is particularly significant, because it provides the nearest cognates for *sīden* and *sīdsa*. I begin, therefore, by examining key features of *seiðr* and their potential relevance to the Old English material, before proceeding to examine one of our earliest narratives concerning *seiðr*. *Seiðr* has been discussed extensively in recent years, but not in an Anglo-Saxon context.[33] The main intentions behind conducting *seiðr* seem to have been divination and the manipulation of targets' states of mind to cause them harm or to facilitate their seduction.[34] It has pejorative connotations throughout our evidence, and these should be explained purely as the result of Christianisation only with caution.[35]

[33] Strömbäck's seminal 1935 study, *Sejd*, is supplemented in its recent reprint by Bo Almqvist, 'I marginalen till *Sejd*', in *Sejd och andra studier i nordisk själsuppfattning av Dag Strömbäck med bidrag av Bo Almqvist, Gertrud Gidlund, Hans Mebius*, ed. Gertrud Gidlund, Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi, 72 (Hedemora: Gidlund, 2000), pp. 237–72, and Hans Mebius, 'Dag Stömbäck och den fornnordiska sejden', in *ibid*., 273–306, with a recent critique by Stephen Mitchell, 'Folklore and Philology Revisited: Medieval Scandinavian Folklore?', in *Norden og Europa: Fagtradisjoner i nordisk etnologi og folkloristikk*, ed. Bjarne Rogan and Bente Gullveig Alver, Occasional Papers from the Department of Culture Studies, University of Oslo, 2 (Oslo: Novus, 2000), pp. 286–94. Major recent studies are Solli, *Seid*; Price, *The Viking Way*; Raudvere, '*Trolldómr*', 109–50.

[34] Strömbäck, *Sejd*, 142–59; cf. Th. A. DuBois, 'Seiðr, Sagas, and Saami: Religious Exchange in the Viking Age', in *Northern Peoples, Southern States: Maintaining Ethnicities in the Circumpolar World*, ed. Robert P. Wheelersburg (Umeå: CERUM, 1996), pp. 43–66, at 44–50.

[35] Strömbäck, *Sejd*, 142, considered divination 'såsom motsats till den förgörande "svarta" sejden, vit sejd' ('by contrast with destructive "black" *seiðr*, white *seiðr*'; cf. Raudvere, '*Trolldómr*', 110–12; Solli, *Seid*, 129–30), but his later emphasis (*Sejd*, 192) that divination by *seiðr* also

A potentially important issue must be addressed before *seiðr* is considered in an Anglo-Saxon context: because aspects of *seiðr* are similar to those found in the shamanic practices of the Arctic regions, and because of a desire to redress long-term oppression of Sámi culture, it has often been argued that *seiðr* practices were borrowed into North Germanic-speaking cultures from the Sámi, whose shamanic traditions are attested for the Middle Ages and remained strong until recent times.[36] If *seiðr*-practices were a post-migration period Scandinavian cultural loan, this would compromise the value of *seiðr* as comparative evidence for *ælfsīden*. However, I prefer Price's balanced perspective, which emphasises the usefulness of Sámi and other circumpolar traditions as comparative evidence for the Norse material, and which accepts the possibility of contact, without denying the prospect of similar traditions in Germanic-speaking cultures.[37] Linguistically, *seiðr* had deep roots in Germanic-speaking cultures, and indeed it now seems clear that its medieval Norwegian reflex was itself later borrowed into the Sámi languages, as **sejda*, apparently denoting places where prophecy was sought from gods.[38] The senses of *seiðr* may still have been influenced by contact with Sámi culture later; but if we find correlations between the meanings of *seiðr* and *ælfsīden*, there is no reason not to accept them to reflect the words' shared etymology. It is also worth noting that although we cannot link them lexically with *sīden*, we have evidence for three concepts in Anglo-Saxon culture which are prominent in our prose accounts of *seiðr*: the capacity for the soul to wander apart from the body; the use of magic wands; and the practice of working magic from a high place.[39]

surely has negative connotations in our evidence is worth reiterating. Thus the prophecy of the *seiðkona* for Ǫrvar-Oddr in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* (cited by Strömbäck, *Sejd*, 96–8) is a curse, prompted by opposition to the *seiðkona* which marks Ǫrvar-Oddr as a 'noble heathen' (cf. Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 61–2). To conclude from the centrality of this episode to the saga's plot that 'witchcraft in Iceland was tolerated more than on the continent' (Morris, *Sorceress*, 18) is unwise. Likewise, in chapter 4 of *Eiríks saga rauða*, a key text for Strömbäck (*Sejd*, 49–60), Guðríðr initially refuses to help in divinatory *seiðr* 'því at ek em kristin kona' ('because I am a Christian woman', ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga, Grœnlendinga sogur*, Íslenzk fornrit, 4 (Reyjkjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritfélag, 1935), 208; cf. DuBois, 'Seiðr', 47–8). The fact that some texts suggest that pagans might have thought *seiðr* a good thing, while themselves undercutting this analysis, is not convincing evidence that *seiðr* once had positive connotations.

36 Price, *The Viking Way*, esp. 233–5; Cf. Solli, *Seid*, 169–97; Mebius, 'Dag Strömbäck', 280; Lindow, 'Cultures in Contact'.

37 *The Viking Way*, 235.

38 Asko Parpola, 'Old Norse SEIÐ(R), Finnish SEITA and Saami Shamanism', in *Etymologie, Entlehnungen und Entwicklungen: Festschrift für Jorma Koivulehto zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Irma Hyvärinen, Petri Kallio and Jarmo Korhonen, Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki, 63 (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 2004), pp. 235–73. It should be noted that Parpola himself, at 244–58, maintained the current trend of arguing that *seiðr* practices were borrowed by Germanic-speakers from Sámi-speakers, despite demonstrating the opposite movement of linguistic influence.

39 See respectively M. R. Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 271–98, at 277; Peter Orton, 'Sticks or Stones? The Story of Imma in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41 of the *Old English Bede*, and Old English *Tān* ('Twig')', *Medium Ævum*, 72 (2003), 1–12 (in which context the Old English charm *Ic mē on þisse gyrde beluce*, ed. Dobbie,

As with so many aspects of early-medieval Scandinavian belief, it is Snorri Sturluson who provides the most explicit and influential comments on *seiðr*, in *Ynglinga saga*. The first comes in chapter 4:

> Njǫrð ok Frey setti Óðinn blótgoða, ok váru þeir díar með Ásum. Dóttir Njarðar var Freyja. Hon var blótgyðja. Hon kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið, sem Vǫnum var títt. Þá er Njǫrðr var með Vǫnum, þá hafði hann átta systur sína, því at þat váru þar lǫg. Váru þeira bǫrn Freyr ok Freyja. En þat var bannat með Ásum at byggva svá náit at frændsemi.[40]
>
> Óðinn established Njǫrðr and Freyr as sacrifice-chieftains, and they were gods[41] along with the *æsir*. Njǫrðr's daughter was Freyja. She was a sacrifice-goddess. It was she who first acquainted the *æsir* with *seiðr*, which was customary among the *vanir*. When Njǫrðr was among the *vanir*, he was married to his sister, because that was the custom there. Their children were Freyr and Freyja. But it was forbidden among the *æsir* for people so closely related to live together.

Snorri's prototypical association of the *vanr* Freyja with *seiðr* is admittedly poorly paralleled.[42] But the explicit association of *seiðr* with the *vanir* is, in an Anglo-Saxon context, too striking to ignore. I have argued above on independent grounds that *vanr* and *álfr* were (partial) synonyms in early-medieval Scandinavia. If this is correct, then the fact that *seiðr*'s Old English cognates occur only compounded or in collocation with *ælf* affords a remarkable correlation with Snorri's claim that *seiðr* was brought to the *æsir* by a *vanr*. Pressing this observation might produce circularity of argument, but it at least suggests that Snorri's accounts of *seiðr*, and Scandinavian evidence for *seiðr* in general, may relate closely to Anglo-Saxon culture.

It is appropriate now to turn to medieval Scandinavian textual correlates for the Old English material. As I have mentioned above, medieval Scandinavian evidence associating *álfar* with causing illness is hard to come by. Of the three certain medieval Scandinavian references which I know, one, the Swedish *Siælinna thrøst*, is a direct translation of the Low German *Der grossen Seelentrost*, while another, a remedy 'For elffwer', appears only in a sixteenth-century Swedish medical text.[43] The remaining reference is to

The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, 126–8, might stand reassessment; cf. John D. Niles, 'The Trick of the Runes in *The Husband's Message*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 189–223); and Anthony Davies, 'Witches in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Manchester: Manchester: Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, University of Manchester, 1989), pp. 41–56; cf. McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 97 n. 20. For the Scandinavian evidence see Price, *The Viking Way*, 162–3, 175–80, 208–9, 363–78. For other pertinent arguments see Glosecki, *Shamanism*; more widely the summary in Mebius, 'Dag Strömbäck', 298–9, and the cautious assessment in Price, *The Viking Way*, 315–17.

40 Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I 13.

41 *Díar* occurs only here and in *Skáldskaparmál* in prose, probably borrowed from stanza 3 of Kormakr Ǫgmundarson's *Sigurðardrápa*, where Snorri took it to mean 'gods' (ed. Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, I 85). This is consistent with its Old Irish etymon, *dí* ('God, god'): the common translation 'priests' is *ad hoc*.

42 Näsström, *Freyja*, 82–5; against the long-standing identification of the *seiðr*-working Heiðr in *Vǫluspá* 21 with Freyja see McKinnell, 'Eddic Poetry'.

43 For *Siælinna thrøst* see p. 125 n. 24 above. G. E. Klemming (ed.), *Läke- och örte-böcker från sveriges medeltid* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1883–6), 394–5.

álfavolkun ('illness inflicted by *alfar*') in an Icelandic text.[44] Two magical curses attested for the fourteenth century mention *álfar*, but not in contexts which clearly attest to them causing illness. One is in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, from around the second half of the fourteenth century, in which the eponymous hero Bósi is rescued from a death-sentence by the *töfrar* ('sorcery, charms') of his friend Busla. The opening stanza of her second spell – the only stanza of the spell quoted – runs:

> Tröll ok álfar ok töfrnornir,
> búar, bergrisar brenni þínar hallir,
> hati þik hrímþursar, hestar streði þik,
> stráin strangi þik, en stormar æri þik,
> ok vei verði þér, nema þú vilja minn gerir.[45]

> May trolls/witches and *álfar* and magic-*nornir*, dwellers (cf. *haugbúar*, 'burial mound-dwellers'?), mountain-giants, burn your halls, frost-*þursar* despise you, horses bugger you, the straws sting you, and gales drive you mad, and woe befall you, unless you do my will.

Here *álfar* are invoked to cause misfortune, interestingly alongside various monstrous beings which in earlier evidence seem distinct from *álfar* and *nornir*; but illness is not prominent in the misfortune invoked. A similar text was found in Bergen, carved on a fourteenth-century rune-stave, seeking to seduce a woman through cursing. It concludes with letters without linguistic meaning, and the end of the stave has been lost, but the bulk of the text is a charm in Eddaic metre, which I somewhat tentatively translate:

> Ríst ek bótrúnar,
> ríst ek bjargrúnar,
> einfalt við álfum,
> tvífalt við tröllum,
> þrífalt við þursum
> . . .
> við inni skœðu
> skag-valkyrju,
> svá at ei megi
> þó at æ vili
> lævís kona
> lífi þínu
> . . .
> Ek sendi þér,
> ek sé á þér

[44] See *DONP*, s.v. Régis Boyer, *Le monde du double: la magie chez les anciens Scandinaves* (Paris: Berg International, 1986), 113–14, claimed, without giving a reference, that 'une . . . croix de plomb porte une conjuration sans équivoque: *contra elphos hec in plumbo scrive*' ('one . . . lead cross bears an unequivocal charm: *inscribe this in lead against "elphi"* '; cf. Lecouteux, *Nains et elfes*, 125). But he seems to have meant a lead plate from Odense, bearing a text which has a German manuscript version. Of these, only the manuscript says 'contra elphos hec in plumbo scribe' (*Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1956–78), s.v. *Blykors*); whether this was the intended function of the Odense inscription is not clear.

[45] Ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Fornaldarsögur norðurlanda*, 3 vols (Reyjkjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1943–4), II 474.

ylgjar ergi ok óþola.
Á þér renni óþoli
ok 'ioluns' móð.
Sittu aldri,
sof þu aldri
. . .
ant mér sem sjalfri þér.[46]

I carve remedy-runes,
I carve protection runes,
once over by *álfar*,
twice over by *trǫll* ('?magic-workers, trolls')
thrice over by *þursar* ('?magic-workers, giants')
. . .
by the harmful
'?skag'-*valkyrja*,
so that you may have no power of action
though you always want,
?crafty woman,
in your life
. . .
I send to you,
I chant on you
a she-wolf's lust and restlessness.
May restlessness come over you
and a *jǫtunn*'s fury (reading *iotuns*).
Never sit,
never sleep.
. . .
love me as you love yourself.

Unfortunately, the translation of *við* in the phrase *við álfum* is problematic: it would normally be expected to mean 'against', but this seems not to make much sense here since the charm does not seek to protect its object from supernatural threats, but to coerce her. We either have two texts rather ineffectively stitched together or perhaps, as in my translation, an instrumental usage of *við* (admittedly better attested in prose).[47] Important though these charms are, they do not afford close parallels to the evidence of the Old English medical texts.

Striking parallels do arise, however, from chapter 13 of Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga*, built around stanza 3 of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini's *Ynglingatal*:

> Vanlandi hét sonr Sveigðis, er ríki tók eptir hann ok réð fyrir Uppsalaauð. Hann var hermaðr mikill, ok hann fór víða um lǫnd. Hann þá vetrvist á Finnlandi með Snjá inum gamla ok fekk þar dóttur hans, Drífu. En at vári fór hann á brót, en Drífa var eptir, ok hét hann at koma aptr á þriggja vetra fresti, en hann kom eigi á tíu vetrum. Þá sendi Drífa eptir Hulð seiðkonu, en sendi Vísbur, son þeira Vanlanda, til Svíþjóðar. Drífa keypti at Hulð seiðkonu, at hon skyldi síða Vanlanda til Finnlands eða deyða hann at ǫðrum kosti. En er seiðr var framiðr,

[46] Ed. John McKinnell, Rudolf Simek and Klaus Düwel, *Runes, Magic and Religion: A Sourcebook*, Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia, 10 (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2004), 131–2.

[47] See on the one hand McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, *Runes*, 132; and on the other Cleasby and Vigfusson, *Dictionary*, A.III.2; Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum*, s.v. *við* 1 §§B.1, B.7.

var Vanlandi at Uppsǫlum. Þá gerði hann fúsan at fara til Finnlands, en vinir hans ok ráðamenn bǫnnuðu honum ok sǫgðu, at vera myndi fjǫlkynngi Finna í fýsi hans. Þá gerðisk honum svefnhǫfugt, ok lagðisk hann til svefns. En er hann hafði lítt sofnat, kallaði hann ok sagði, at mara trað hann. Menn hans fóru til ok vildu hjálpa honum. En er þeir tóku uppi til hǫfuðsins, þá trað hon fótleggina, svá at nær brotnuðu. Þá tóku þeir til fótanna, þá kafði hon hǫfuðit, svá at þar dó hann. Svíar tóku lík hans, ok var hann brenndr við á þá, er Skúta heitir. Þar váru settir bautasteinar hans. Svá segir Þjóðólfr:

The son of Sveigðir was called Vanlandi, who received the kingdom after him and ruled over Uppsalaauðr [=the wealth of Uppsala]. He was a great warrior, and he travelled widely about the land. He accepted winter accommodation in *Finnland* with Snjá [=Snow] the Old, and there took his daughter, Drífa [=Sleet]. But in the spring he went away, while Drífa was left behind, and he promised to come back after three winters' wait, but he did not come in ten years. Then Drífa sent for Hulð the witch [*seiðr*-woman], and sent Vísburr, her and Vanlandi's son, to Sweden. Drífa struck a bargain with the witch Hulð, that she should enchant (*síða*) Vanlandi to *Finnland*, or otherwise kill him. Now, when the magic (*seiðr*) was done, Vanlandi was at Uppsala. Then he eagerly made to travel to *Finnland*, but his friends and counsellors forbade him and said that there would be an enchantment (*fjǫlkynngi*) of the *Finnar* behind his desire. Then he became drowsy, and laid himself down to sleep. But when he had slept a short while, he cried and said that a *mara* trampled him. His men went there and wanted to help him. But when they went to the head, then it/she trampled the legs, so that they nearly broke. When they went to the feet, it/she smothered the head, so that he died there. The Swedes took his body, and he was burnt by the river which is called Skúta. His monument-stone was set there. Thus, Þjóðólfr says:

En á vit
Vilja bróður
vitta véttr
Vanlanda kom,
þás trollkund
of troða skyldi
líðs grímhildr
ljóna bága,
ok sá brann
á beði Skútu
menglǫtuðr,
es mara kvalði.[48]

But to a meeting
with Vili's brother [=Óðinn]
the ?demon of magic
brought Vanlandi,
when the ?witch-born
Grímhildr of ale [?=*dís*][49]
had to trample upon
the enemy of men [=warrior],

[48] Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I 28–9.

[49] Some commentators read *liðs* ('of the warband'; for example, McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 96). But both this reading and the edition's *líðs* suggest a valkyrie-kenning. I assume that this reading has hitherto been avoided because of an unwillingness to equate a monstrous female supernatural being with a *valkyrja*, but the negative side of *valkyrjur*'s propensity to inflict slaughter is emphasised *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, stanza 38, ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 136.

and he burned
on the bank of the Skúta,
necklace-generous,
whom the *mara* killed.

Since it is not certain that Snorri was any wiser than we are about the story to which this verse originally alluded, we can rely only on the verse itelf as evidence for ninth-century beliefs. It is problematic, but seems clearly to portray Vanlandi to have been trodden to death by a *trollkund* being, a *mara*. This affords an early and respectably close analogue to the Anglo-Saxon conception of *maran* riding the sick discussed above. What is really useful here, however, is Snorri's thirteenth-century prose. McKinnell has read this as an example of a narrative pattern repeated several times in the saga and elsewhere.[50] My considerations do not aim to contradict McKinnell's analysis, but (drawing in the next section on different comparative evidence) do have a different focus, producing some slightly different conclusions from his approach (which need not, however, be mutually exclusive).

Characteristically of Old Icelandic saga-writing, Snorri's account of Vanlandi's death is ambiguous: a bargain is struck with a *seiðkona* for Vanlandi's seduction or, failing that, his murder; subsequently, a *mara* attacks him. But it is also characteristic of Old Icelandic saga-writing that the narrator's juxtaposition of events and the speculations of his characters are sufficient to imply that Vanlandi's death was not only the *seiðkona*'s doing but that she herself was, in some sense, the *mara* which attacked him.[51] Snorri attests, then, to the idea that the trampling and suffocating *mara* might be a *seiðkona* who had changed her form through *seiðr*. In Bald's Leechbook, meanwhile, it seems evident that riding by a *mære* was a possible manifestation of *ælfsīden*. The correlation is striking. Admittedly, Snorri's narrative does not mention *álfar*. But this should not obscure a deeper correlation: as I have discussed above, *Finnar* such as Drífa could occupy much the same space in medieval Scandinavian world-views as *álfar* (chapter 1); the point is emphasised by the fact that the story of Vanlandi and Drífa shares much with that of Helgi Hálfdanarson and an *álfkona* in chapter 15 of *Hrólfs saga kraka*.[52] Snorri's story

50 *Meeting the Other*, 62–80.

51 Cf. Catharina Raudvere, *Föreställningar om maran i nordisk folktro*, Lund Studies in History of Religions, 1 (Lund: Religionshistoriska Avdelningen, Lunds Universitet, 1993), 78–82, 90.

52 Helgi has sex with a woman who proves to be an *álfkona*; before she leaves, Helgi agrees to collect the child which he has just begotten the next year. He does not, and three years later, the girl is instead delivered to his door. This is similar to the story of Vanlandi and Drífa, though admittedly in *Hrólfs saga kraka* it is the otherworldly woman who visits the king, not the other way round. Helgi is not killed, but the girl is later instrumental in the death of Helgi's son Hrólfr kraki (cf. Vǫlundr's revenge on Níðuðr). This story is innovative in the Hrólfr kraki tradition and possibly as late as the seventeenth century, the date of our earliest manuscript (D. Slay, *The Manuscripts of Hrólfs saga kraka*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 24 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), 4–15; for other versions see Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir, 'A Valiant King or a Coward? The Changing Image of King Hrólfr kraki from the Oldest Sources to *Hrólfs saga kraka*', in *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney, Nordiska texter och undersökningar, 28 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, Institutionen för Nordiska Språk, 2003), pp. 141–56, at 142–4), but it still shows the transferability of the concepts of *Finnr* and *álfkona*.

of the *fjǫlkynngi Finna* may be a good representative of the kind of narrative which might have been attached to *ælfe*, underlying the Old English collocation of *ælfsīden* with *mære*.[53] That this should have been the case is suggested further by a text, closer to Anglo-Saxon England in time and, for what it may be worth, in space, concerning the otherworldly beings *par excellence*, the early Irish *áes síde*.

Serglige Con Culainn

The narrative in question occurs as section 8 of *Serglige Con Culainn*, conventionally translated as 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn', though *serglige* might perhaps be rendered – less literally but more idiomatically – as 'love-sickness' here. Its primary manuscript, Lebor na hUidre, is a complex compilation written and altered during the eleventh and possibly the twelfth centuries. Lebor na hUidre seems originally to have contained one version, known now as A, but the pages containing the first half of this were subsequently replaced with new ones by a revising scribe. On to these he copied another version – a conflation of an A-text with a different recension known as B – and also erased and rewrote passages in the second half of the original Lebor na hUidre text. The material judged to derive from B exhibits linguistic features pointing, amongst later ones, to the ninth century, while the language of A seems to be eleventh-century.[54] A has long been considered the earlier version of the story nevertheless, but Carey has recently argued that B is the earlier version.[55]

The following text is thought to derive from B – so whatever the priority of A and B, it probably derives from around the ninth century. Cú Chulainn is by a lake at the autumn festival of *samuin*, when two birds land there, linked by a

[53] The identity of the *mara~mære* with a shape-changing witch is not clearly paralleled in medieval English, so I have excluded it from consideration here. However, it is suggested by the synonymy of *mare* with *wyche* ('witch') attested by the *Promptorium parvulorum*, from the 1440s: 'Mare, or wyche. *Magus, maga, sagana*', ed. Way, *Promptorium parvulorum*, II 326. The idea is well attested later in English tradition (see Owen Davies, 'Hag-Riding in Nineteenth-Century West-Country England and Modern Newfoundland: An Examination of an Experience-Centred Witchcraft Tradition', *Folk Life*, 35 (1997), 36–53), the earliest clear example coming in Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*, composed in the late 1590s, the Hostess threatens Falstaff by warning that 'I will ride thee o' nights like the mare' (II. i. 85–6; ed. W. J. Craig, *Shakespeare: Complete Works* (London: Oxford University Press, 1905), 445). Although the Hostess does not threaten to become a *mare* as such, the threatened situation is similar to that of Hulð with the *mara*.

[54] On texts and language see Myles Dillon, 'On the Text of Serglige Con Culainn', *Éigse*, 3 (1941–2), 120–9; (ed.), *Serglige Con Culainn*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series, 14 ([Dublin]: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953), xi–xvi; Trond Kruke Salberg, 'The Question of the Main Interpolation of H into M's Part of the *Serglige Con Culainn* in the *Book of the Dun Cow* and Some Related Problems', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 45 (1992), 161–81, esp. 161–2; cf. John Carey, 'The Uses of Tradition in *Serglige Con Culainn*', in *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and Emain Macha, 8–12 April 1994*, ed. J. P. Mallory and Gerard Stockman (Belfast: December, 1994), pp. 77–84, at 81–3; Joanne Findon, *A Woman's Words: Emer and Female Speech in the Ulster Cycle* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 145–6.

[55] '*Serglige Con Culainn*', 81.

gold chain. They sing, and almost everyone present falls asleep. Cú Chulainn, having recently captured enough birds to give two to each woman present apart from his wife, ill-advisedly shoots stones and a spear at the birds, but for the first time in his life, his projectiles miss.[56] The text continues:

> Dothóet Cú Chulaind iar sin co tard a druim frisin liic, ⁊ ba holc a menma leis, ⁊ dofuit cotlud fair. Co n-accai in dá mnaí cucai. Indala n-aí brat úaine imbe. Alaili brat corcra cóicdíabail im ṡude. Dolluid in ben cosin brot úane chucai, ⁊ tibid gen friṡ, ⁊ dobert béim dind echṫleisc dó. Dothóet alaili cucai dano, ⁊ tibid fris, ⁊ nod slaid fón alt chétna. Ocus bátar fri cíana móir oca sin .i. cechtar dé imma sech cucai béus dia búalad combo marb acht bec. Lotir úad íarom. Arigsitar Ulaid uli aní sin, ⁊ asbertatár ara ndúscide. 'Acc!' ol Fergus. 'Náchi nglúasid res atchí.'[57]
>
> Cú Chulainn went then and put his back against a pillar stone, and he was downcast, and a sleep fell upon him. He saw two women come towards him. One wore a green mantle; the other a purple mantle in five folds. The woman in the green mantle came to him and laughed at him, and struck him with her horse-whip. The other came to him, too, and laughed at him, and struck him in the same way. And they continued for a long time, each of them in turn coming still to beat him, so that he was almost dead. Then they went from him. The Ulaid observed that, and they said that he should be wakened. 'No', said Fergus. 'Do not disturb him. It is a vision that he sees.'

These two women are doubtless identical with the two swans which appeared earlier.[58] Cú Chulainn subsequently awakens, but is mute and too weak to move. A year later, after a visit by Oengus, the son of Áed Abrat, the king of the *áes síde*, Cú Chulainn regains some of his strength and returns to the stone. There he meets the woman in green who explains that Fann, the daughter of Áed Abrat, has fallen in love with him.[59] The rest of the story concerns Fann's wooing of Cú Chulainn and the subsequent struggle for Cú Chulainn between Fann and Cú Chulainn's wife.

Various aspects of Cú Chulainn's *serglige* are paralleled in early Irish and perhaps Welsh sources, but what interests me here are the similarities with Snorri's account of the death of Vanlandi.[60] An otherworldly woman (Drífa in *Ynglinga saga*, Fann in *Serglige Con Culainn*) seeks to woo a man of the in-group (Vanlandi, Cú Chulainn) through female otherworldly emissaries, who exhibit magical powers of shape-changing (the *seiðkona* Hulð, the bird-women). The emissaries are effectively rebuffed: Vanlandi resists his urge to go to Lappland, while Cú Chulainn shoots at the birds. Punishment

56 Ed. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, 1–3.

57 Ed. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, 3; trans. Myles Dillon, 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 7 (1951), 47–88, at 50.

58 Findon, *A Woman's Words*, 117–18; cf. Cross, *Motif-Index*, 247 [F234.1.15] and the wooing swan-maidens in *Vǫlundarkviða* st. 1–2.

59 Ed. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, 3–5.

60 John Carey, 'Cú Chulainn as Ailing Hero', in *An Snaidhm Ceilteach: Gnìomharran 10mh Comhdhail Eadar-Nàiseanta na Ceiltis, Imleadhar a h-Aon Cànain, Litreachas, Eachdraidh, Cultar / Celtic Connections: Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Volume One, Language, Literature, History, Culture*, ed. Ronald Black, William Gillies and Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1999), pp. 190–8.

follows, in which the men unexpectedly fall asleep and are assailed by the wooing women. In the Norse text, Hulð turns herself into a *mara* and tramples Vanlandi; in the Irish text, the women beat Cú Chulainn with *echḟlecsa* ('horse-whips').[61] In *Ynglinga saga*, Vanlandi's punishment is death, whereas Cú Chulainn's illness eventually speeds Fann's wooing; even so, the perils of Cú Chulainn's liaison are emphasised by the fact that when Fann leaves him, he falls into madness until his uncle Conchobor sends druids to give him a drink of forgetfulness.

These similarities allow us in the first instance to conclude that Snorri's account of Vanlandi and Drífa is a narrative whose form is, in certain respects, reliably attested in the British Isles for the Anglo-Saxon period. This allows us to posit with greater confidence that Snorri's own story has deeper roots, encouraging its use as a comparison for earlier Anglo-Saxon material. However, although it is not, of course, possible to identify lexical parallels, *Serglige Con Culainn* also deserves consideration as a direct parallel for the Old English medical texts. The use of such evidence in the past has presumably been discouraged on the one hand by the idea that beings like the *áes síde* were distinctively 'Celtic' and so irrelevant to Anglo-Saxon belief, and on the other by the long-standing idea that there was no cultural contact between Ireland and England pertinent to medicine.[62] Moreover, a special Hiberno-Scandinavian literary connection has often been posited, which might allow us to see Snorri's story to reflect contact with Ireland rather than north-west European cultural continuity.[63] However, relevant cultural contact and continuity between early-medieval English- and Irish-speaking cultures now seems less unlikely than it once did. Chapters 3–4 have shown that Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* were, at least in some strands of tradition, far more like the *áes síde* than was once thought, and other commentators have likewise begun to identify similarities and historical connections between Anglo-Saxon and Irish society where once it was customary to look only to

61 Another parallel is chapter 12 of the probably fifteenth-century *Ála flekks saga*, ed. Åke Lagerholm, *Drei Lygisǫgur: Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana, Ála flekks saga, Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek, 17 (Halle (Saale): Niemeyer, 1927), 105–6, in which Áli 'lætr . . . illa í svefni, ok eru svefnfarir hans bæði harðar ok langar' ('lies . . . restless in his sleep, and his sleep-journeys are both hard and long'): a *trǫllkona* besets Áli with an iron whip (*járnsvipa*), cursing him so that the injuries can only be healed by her brother. Lagerholm noted the comparison with both *Serglige Con Culainn* and *Ynglinga saga* (pp. lxvi, 106 n. to §§3–4), but *Ála flekks saga* does not share the other details.

62 For example, Wilfrid Bonser, 'The Dissimilarity of Ancient Irish Magic from that of the Anglo-Saxons', *Folk-Lore*, 37 (1926), 271–88; cf. Howard Meroney, 'Irish in the Old English Charms', *Speculum*, 20 (1945), 172–82, at 172–3; Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, xxix–xxxii.

63 For example, Chadwick, 'Literary Tradition'; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Celtic Elements in Icelandic Tradition', *Béaloideas: The Journal of the Folklore Society of Ireland*, 25 (1957), 3–24; Bo Almqvist, 'Scandinavian and Celtic Folklore Contacts in the Earldom of Orkney', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 20 (1978–81), 80–105; cf. Michael Chesnutt, 'An Unsolved Problem in Old Norse-Icelandic Literary History', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 1 (1968), 122–34; '*Cath Maige Tuired* – A Parable of the Battle of Clontarf', in *Northern Lights: Following Folklore in North-Western Europe. Aistí in Adhnó do Bho Almqvist / Essays in Honour of Bo Almqvist*, ed. Séamas Ó Catháin (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2001), pp. 22–33; Niels Lukman, 'An Irish Source and Some Icelandic *Fornaldarsögur*', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 10 (1977), 41–57.

Germanic-speaking regions.[64] It is also worth noting that a small amount of Irish material appears in Bald's Leechbook and the *Lācnunga*, attesting to at least some relevant cultural communication concerning illness.[65]

Serglige Con Culainn involves several motifs correlating particularly with our evidence for *ælfsīden* and for *ælfe*. *Ælfsīden* was caused by *ælfe* and specifically was associated with fever; this association connects more generally to an association of *ælfe* with causing delusions. Likewise, the specific effect of the actions of Fann's emissaries is to cause Cú Chulainn to sleep and see a *res* ('vision'). A possible outcome of *ælfsīden* seems to be that a *mære* might ride the victim; so although early-medieval visions involved saints and angels whipping the visionary reasonably often, the horse-whips used by Fann's emissaries in *Serglige Con Culainn* to beat Cú Chulainn during his vision correspond to the English material particularly neatly.[66] Finally – and this parallel stands for Drífa, but less prominently – *ælfe* seem to have been associated with dangerously seductive beauty, and Fann's agents act in order to seduce Cú Chulainn, for a supernatural female whose seductive beauty is related prominently later in the text. We may plausibly – though tentatively – imagine that remedies 'wið ælfcynne ⁊ nihtgengan ⁊ þām mannum þe deofol mid hæmð' or 'wiþ ǣlcre lēodrūnan ⁊ ælfsīdenne' were conceived in a culture in which illness might not only be caused by *ælfe*, but might represent attempts at seduction or revenge at rejection, effected through magic and perhaps including assaults in the form of *maran*.

The South English Legendary

That it would not be far-fetched to imagine themes like this in tenth-century England is emphasised by Middle English evidence. A few pieces of evidence associate *elves* with magic. Prominent among them is Chaucer's use of *elf* in the *Man of Law's Tale*: in an effort to convince her son King Alla that his wife and their new-born son should be abandoned, Donegild claims in lines 750–6 that

> . . . the queene delivered was
> Of so horrible a feendly creature
> That in the castel noon so hardy was
> That any while dorste {dared} ther endure {remain}.
> The mooder was an elf, by aventure {strange event}
> Ycomen, by charmes or by sorcerie,
> And every wight {person} hateth hir compaignye.[67]

The *elf*'s use of *charmes* and *sorcerie* here (in the context, moreover, of Alla's

64 See Michael Richter, *Ireland and her Neighbours in the Seventh Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999) and the self-consciously integrationist *After Rome*, ed. Thomas Charles-Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

65 Meroney, 'Charms'; Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, xxix–xxxi.

66 Cf. Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great, by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1968), 102–4, 151 n. 74.

67 Ed. Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 98.

seduction) neatly parallel *ælfsīden*. In the fifteenth century – with its dominant intellectual framework of book-based magic, we find a Latin narrative in a treatise on the Ten Commandments which tells of the 'filius cuiusdam viri qui infirmabatur, quem pater duxit ad quemdam clericum in patria, qui habeat librum qui vocabatur *an heluenbok*, ut per eius benediccionem recuperat sanitatem' ('son of a certain man who became infirm, whom the father led to a certain cleric in that country, who had a book which was called *an heluenbok* ['an *elven*-book'], so that he [the son] might regain his health through through his [the cleric's] blessing').[68] The story explains that although the son was cured, the father went mad. As Wenzel suggested, the *heluenbok* seems surely to be a grimoire, and the implication is that *elven-* seemed an appropriate way of indicating the magical character of this book.[69] We might also compare this material with the observation of Heinrich von Morungen, who died in 1222, that 'Von den elben wirt entsehen vil manic man' ('Many a man indeed is enchanted by the *elben*').[70]

Most striking, however, is the *South English Legendary*, already mentioned above, composed in the Worcester/Gloucester area around the 1270s.[71] The passage in question comes from a cosmography included in the account of the Archangel Michael. After describing how some evil spirits oppress sleepers as *maren*, it declares

Þe ssrewen wolleþ ek oþerwile ·	The evil creatures desire also at other times
mankunne to bi-traie	to betray mankind,
A-liȝte a-doun in monnes forme ·	alight down in human form
biniȝte & bidaie	by night and by day,
And liggeþ ofte bi wymmen ·	and lie often with women
ase hi were of fleiss & blode	as though they were of flesh and blood;
Ac þe engendrure þat hi makeþ ·	but the offspring that they beget
ne comþ neuere to gode	never come to good.
And ofte in forme of womman ·	And often in woman's form,
aday and eke nyȝt	in the day and also night,
Hi leteþ men hom ligge bi ·	they let men lie with them
and bitraieþ hom outriȝt	and betray them outright:
For hi weteþ wuch beoþ men ·	for they know which are the men
þat to folie habbeþ wille	who have desire of folly.
Al one in som deorne stude ·	Alone in some hidden place
hi stondeþ þanne wel stille	they stand then very quiet/still,
And mani fol hom liþ so by ·	and many a fool lies with them thus,
in wode and eke in mede	in the wood and in the meadow.
Ac þer nis non þat so deþ ·	But there is none who does so
þat ne acoreþ þe dede	that does not suffer from the deed:
Hore membres toswelleþ somme ·	their penises swell up ?somewhat,

68 Ed. Siegfried Wenzel, 'The Middle English Lexicon: Help from the Pulpit', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Korhammer (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 467–76, at 472, n. 29.

69 Wenzel, 'Middle English Lexicon', 473.

70 Ed. Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren, *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, 36th edn, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1977), I 243; cf. Edwards, 'Heinrich von Morungen'.

71 Görlach, *Studies*, 27.

& somme ofscapeþ vnneþe	and some [?men] survive with difficulty,
And somme fordwineþ al awei ·	and some dwindle completely away,
forte huy be[o] ibroȝt to deþe	whereby they are brought to death.
More wonder it is iwis ·	A greater wonder it is, for sure,
hou eni ofscapeþ of liue	how any escapes alive,
for an attri þing it is ·	for a poisonous thing it is,
to lemman oþer to wiue	to a [male] lover or a woman.
And ofte in forme of womman ·	And often in the form of woman
in mony deorne weie	on many a hidden path
Me sicþ of hom gret companie ·	men see a great company of them
boþe hoppe & pleie	both dance and play,
Þat eleuene beoþ icluped ·	that are called *eluene* [following other MSS],
þat ofte comeþ to toune	who/which often come to town,
And bi daie muche in wode beoþ ·	and by day they are often in the wood,
& biniȝte upe heie doune	and by night upon high hills,
Þat beoþ of þe wrecche gostes ·	that are from among the wretched spirits
þat of heuene were inome	who/which were taken out of heaven.
And mony of hom a Domesday ·	And many of them yet
ssolleþ ȝute to reste come	will come to rest on Doomsday;
Ac þe ssrewen þat beoþ biniȝte ·	but the evil spirits which exist at night,
and eke bidaie	and also by day,
Fondieþ wiþ wuch felonie ·	tempt [us] with every wile:
hi mouweþ men mest bitraie[72]	they can betray people most.

Though different in important respects from the Scandinavian and Irish texts just discussed, this depicts *schrewene* in the form of women – who are identified with the dancing cavalcades of *eluene* mentioned at the end of the passage – waiting in hidden places and seducing men; the consequence for the men is a wasting illness (possibly specifically of the penis, the text is ambigious). Although this illness is not identified with the *mare*, it is juxtaposed with it in a way which suggests that the one idea led to the other. That Anglo-Saxons should have had similar conceptions regarding *ælfe* three centuries earlier, then, is entirely plausible.

Implications

These texts allow us to guess at how to interpret mentions of *ælfsīden*, but they also provide a context in which we can guess at what wider cultural meanings beliefs relating to *ælfsīden* may have had. Establishing this framework requires two stages. First I consider the meanings of the texts themselves: each is a cautionary tale, warning not only against the dangers of the otherworld, but also the dangers of acting unwisely towards its members. The next section addresses a key difference: the fact that the otherworldly beings in these texts are predominantly female, whereas I have emphasised our Old English evidence that early Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* were male.

The main implication of the *South English Legendary* is that malicious demons may come among humans and disrupt society with illusions and

[72] Ed. d'Evelyn and Mill, *Legendary*, II 409–10 at 409; cf. Horstmann, *Legendary*, 306–7, whose variant text provided some guidance on interpreting ambiguities.

by inflicting illness upon those deceived by their sexual temptations. But its condemnation of fallen angels is equivocal – some of the *eluene*, it seems, are not damned – and the text implies that a man who would have sex with the demons is a *fol* ('fool'), putting responsibility on the deluded as well as on the demons. *Serglige Con Culainn* explicitly takes a similar demonising line, concluding with the comment,

> Conid taibsiu aidmillti do Choin Chulaind la háes sídi sin. Ar ba mór in chumachta demnach ria cretim, ⁊ ba hé a méit co cathaigtis co corptha na demna frisna doínib ⁊ co taisféntais aíbniusa ⁊ díamairi dóib, amal no betis co marthanach. Is amlaid no creteá dóib. Conid frisna taidbsib sin atberat na hanéolaig síde ⁊ áes síde.[73]
>
> That is the disastrous vision shown to Cú Chulainn by the fairies. For the diabolical power was great before the faith, and it was so great that devils used to fight with men in bodily form, and used to show delights and mysteries to them, as though they really existed. So they were believed to be; and ignorant men used to call those visions *síde* and *áes síde*.

These words, like the Anglo-Saxon medical texts, reflect a world in which traditional beliefs in otherworldly beings such as the *áes síde* could neither be condoned nor abandoned.[74] However, 'this "rewriting" of the text's meaning only barely contains its tensions and ambiguities': *Serglige Con Culainn* affords a nuanced investigation of the causes and consequences of sexual liaisons which transgress accepted social boundaries.[75] Findon stressed the efforts of Church reformers in medieval Ireland to end traditional practices of polygamy as a context for *Serglige Con Culainn*, though it may, like the *South English Legendary*, target sexual promiscuity generally.[76] Undeniably, the principal threat to social order comes from the otherworldly being, Fann (who is herself transgressing the bounds of her own society, in seeking a lover other than her husband, Mannanán mac Lir), while Carey has laid the foundations for positive readings of Cú Chulainn's sickness.[77] But Findon has argued persuasively that the text as we have it shows the disorder beginning within the in-group, principally in Cú Chulainn's continual failure to act wisely. He is not unreminiscent, then, of the *South English Legendary*'s *fol*. Cú Chulainn loses the power proper to his aristocratic male status by mishandling Fann's suit and so allowing himself to be subjected to an otherworldly female. In the words of his charioteer, Lóeg,

> Mór espa do láech
> laigi fri súan serglige,
> ar donadbat genaiti
> áesa a Tenmag Trogaigi,
> condot rodbsat,
> condot chachtsat,

[73] Ed. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, 29; trans. Dillon 'The Wasting Sickness', 75.
[74] Cf. Carey, '*Serglige Con Culainn*', 78–9.
[75] Findon, *A Woman's Words*, 133.
[76] *A Woman's Words*, 107–34, esp. 111–13.
[77] 'Cú Chulainn'.

condot ellat,
eter bríga banespa.[78]

It is a great folly for a warrior
to lie in the sleep of a wasting-sickness,
because it belies demons,
peoples of Tenmag Trogaige,
and [that] they have injured(?) you,
and bound you,
and afflicted(?) you,
in the power of woman-wantonness.

Lóeg's criticisms chime, of course, with my reading in chapter 1 of Vǫlundr in *Vǫlundarkviða* as a figure shamefully disempowered by the swan-maiden who seduces him.

Unlike the other texts, *Ynglinga saga* does not orientate itself to Christian demonology, but it parallels Findon's reading of *Serglige Con Culainn* nevertheless.[79] Lönnroth remarked of female *Finnar* that 'Several Yngling kings are bewitched by the wealth and beauty of such women . . . but a marriage with them will always turn out to be disastrous, since they are evil and practiced in the art of *seiðr*'.[80] This is more or less correct, but in Vanlandi's case, the disaster surely begins with Vanlandi's own actions. Stepping outside the controlled space of his society, he rashly follows his erotic desires – the text does not imply that Drífa was the wooer – without respecting the consequences. Unlike the *South English Legendary* and *Serglige Con Culainn*, the death of Vanlandi does not seem to warn against extramarital liaisons *per se*: Vanlandi's transgression is in breaking a promise. The consequence is that he is ignominiously murdered in his sleep by a woman using magic. This reading is paralleled by recent readings of the narrative of Helgi Hálfdanarson and the *álfkona* in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.[81] The story of Vanlandi and Drífa certainly implies that places and peoples from beyond the in-group are dangerous, but also that their threat is manifested in response to individuals' impropriety. The prominence of these concerns is consistent with Clunies Ross's argument

78 Ed. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn*, 11.

79 Contrast the *Historia Norwegiae*, also based on *Ynglingatal*, ed. Gustav Storm, *Monumenta historica Norwegiæ: Latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen* (Kristiania: Brøgger, 1880), 97–8 (cf. 213): 'Swegthir . . . genuit Wanlanda, qui in somno a dæmone suffocatus interiit, quod genus dæmoniorum norwegico sermone mara vocatur' ('Sveigðir . . . begat Vanlandi, who died in his sleep, suffocated by a demon; that kind of demon is called *mara* in the Norwegian language').

80 Lars Lönnroth, 'Dómaldi's Death and the Myth of Sacral Kingship', in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, ed. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilisation, 3 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 73–93, at 81–2; cf. Hermann Pálsson, *Úr landnorðri*, 141–56; McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 62–80.

81 Ármann Jakobsson, 'Queens of Terror: Perilous Women in *Hálfs saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*', in *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney, Nordiska texter och undersökningar, 28 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, Institutionen för Nordiska Språk, 2003), pp. 173–89, at 178–84; Marianne Kalinke, 'Transgression in *Hrólfs saga kraka*', in *ibid*., pp. 157–71, at 161–3; Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir, 'Hrólfr kraki', 142–4; Carl Phelpstead, 'The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 75 (2003), 1–24.

that Old Norse mythology foregrounds issues of procreation, marriage and women as tokens in inter-group exchange, and Bredsdorff's demonstration of the prominence of men's improper exercise of erotic desires as a cause of social disorder in the *Íslendingasögur* – not least in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, also likely to be by Snorri.[82]

That Anglo-Saxons might take a similar attitude to men seduced by otherworldly magic-working females is hinted at by my reading of *Vǫlundarkviða* in chapter 1, but is suggested more reliably by the Alfredian renderings of Boethius's account, in the third metre of Book 4 of the *De consolatione philosophiae*, of Ulysses and Circe.[83] As this story emerges in the Old English text, 'Ulysses is a king who abuses his royal responsibilities: he abandons his kingdom to remain with Circe'.[84] Although the only punishment he suffers in this narrative is the translator's opprobrium, the attitude to Ulysses is not unlike the attitudes for which I have argued towards Cú Chulainn, Vanlandi and Helgi Hálfdanarson. Otherworldly females are a force for disorder, violating and even inverting the patriarchal power-structures of the societies in question – but this force operates only through men's own destablising passions.

It is striking that the closest parallels for our *ælfsīden* texts concern seduction. This correlates with the quite separate evidence of scholarly glosses and Old English poetry considered in chapter 3, which also link *ælfe* with seductive beauty, and to some extent with the centrality to our narratives about the *álfr* Vǫlundr of his identity as a sexual threat to Bǫðvildr; moreover, it hints at an Anglo-Saxon discourse concerning sex and gender absent from our mainstream evidence. A twofold interpretation emerges from the texts. The narratives comprise a discourse of gendering, elucidating the importance of power and independence to masculinity by showing the consequences of its loss to supernatural illness. This loss comes, however, with the abuse of power: it comes, in this model, to those who deserve it, both providing potential aetiologies of illness and upholding social order. This comparative context helps to demonstrate the plausibility of the similar readings which I have offered of *Wið fǣrstice*, while emphasising the potential of supernatural beings to relate to ideologies of gender. In this latter respect, however, they are somewhat problematic.

Males and magic

A limitation of the texts just considered is that they concern female otherworldly beings, whereas I have argued above that *ælf* primarily denoted

[82] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, esp. 185–186; Thomas Bredsdorff, *Chaos & Love: The Philosophy of the Icelandic Family Sagas*, trans. John Tucker (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001) (first publ. *Kaos og kærlighed: en studie i islændingesagaers livsbillede* (Copenhagen: Glydendal, 1971)), esp. 13–35. For the ascription of *Egils saga* see Peter Hallberg, *Snorri Sturluson och Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Studia Islandica, 20 (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1962); cf. Melissa A. Berman, '*Egils saga* and *Heimskringla*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 54 (1982), 21–50.

[83] Ed. Sedgefield, *Boethius*, 115–16, 193–7; Moreschini, *Boethivs*, 111–12.

[84] Irvine, 'Ulysses', 395; cf. Pratt, 'Illnesses', 79–80.

males – and indeed that early Anglo-Saxon belief systems may have lacked female equivalents of *ælfe*, which surely suggests that they had no close equivalent to figures like Fann. Indeed, medieval Irish, Welsh and French literatures are replete with seductive otherworldly females, but males are much rarer.[85] When otherworldly males do appear, they generally succeed in having sex with women either by persuasion or brute force, and so without using magic or inflicting illness.[86] One response to this would be to argue that our evidence for the insignificance of female *ælfe* in early Anglo-Saxon belief systems is chimeric, or that by the time of our medical texts, female *ælfe* had already become prominent, their late attestation in the glosses being an accident of our evidence. However, although it is risky to make inferences from sparse and problematic data like our Old English glosses, it is at least as risky to project belief-systems suggested by a generically limited range of narratives back across several centuries without consideration for which elements have reliable points of comparison in the earlier material. It is appropriate, therefore, to examine how else the disjunction in our evidence can be explained. For reasons of genre, the gender balance in our later texts may give a misleading impression of wider belief, and although it is not as neat as that adduced above, there is evidence for otherworldly males using *seiðr* to inflict illness – again, as it happens, in the course of seduction.

The preponderance of otherworldly females in our high-medieval evidence is almost certainly partly an artefact of our source material, and not representative of tradition more generally. Medieval otherworldly narratives, as McKinnell found in his study of Scandinavian examples, frequently involve cross-gender encounters, in which one of the characters represents the in-group. Since 'the representative of This World is nearly always male', the otherworldly (or monstrous) party tends therefore to be female.[87] The reasons for this are various, but doubtless relate to a predilection for male protagonists in medieval secular literature reflecting the patriarchal dominance of society, action and patronage, and its power to constrain the expectations even of female poets, audiences and patrons.[88] When, in the Scottish witchcraft trials, we finally begin to glimpse English-speaking women's narratives of encounters with *elvis* and *fareis* – admittedly through the haze of intellectual demonology – there is no shortage of male *elvis*; it is perhaps telling that our clearest high-medieval attestation of a male *elf* is put in the mouth of a woman, the Wife of Bath.

[85] See Guerreau-Jalabert, *Index*, 64–5 [F234.2.5, F252.5(B), F301, F302]; Cross, *Motif-Index*, 255–8 [F300–4]; ; Harf-Lancner, *Les fées*, esp. 59–77; Gallais, *La fée*. Of the 'fairy lovers' cited by Cross [F301], Art mac Coin surely does not qualify, as he is a member of the in-group who must win a maiden from Tir Thairngaire ('the Land of Wonders'; ed. R. I. Best, 'The Adventures of Art Son of Conn, and the Courtship of Delbchæm', *Ériu*, 3 (1907), 149–73).

[86] For example, the Middle English *Sir Degarré*, ed. Anna Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 105; also at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/salisbur.htm>, accessed 11 October 2004; the Anglo-Norman *Yonec*, ed. Ewert, *Maire de France*, 82–96; *Vǫlundarkviða*, discussed above, chapter 1.

[87] *Meeting the Other*, 7.

[88] See also McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 7–8, 78–80, 161.

There is no doubt that the practice of *seiðr* was ideologically linked with women in medieval Scandinavia. The principal evidence is again from *Ynglinga saga*, this time chapter 6. Snorri said of *seiðr* that 'þessi fjǫlkynngi, er framið er, fylgir svá mikil ergi, at eigi þótti karlmǫnnum skammlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kennd sú íþrótt' ('this sorcery, when it is performed, brings with it such great *ergi* that engaging in that did not seem to men to be without shame, and that accomplishment was taught to the priestesses').[89] As Dubois has pointed out, Snorri's reliability here can be questioned, but his statement finds some earlier support.[90] Loki accuses Óðinn in *Lokasenna* (admittedly by emendation) of working *seiðr* 'sem vǫlur' ('like prophetesses'), which he characterises as *argr* – perversely transgressive of gender norms.[91] This, of course, could be Snorri's source, but a post-conversion Danish runestone, Skern stone 2, dating from around 1000, curses as a *síði* ('*seiðr*-worker') anyone who breaks the stone.[92] Although *síði* is not attested earlier, the Danish curse is in a tradition of cursing *argskapr* upon desecrators going back at least to the eighth century, being attested already in Sweden on the probably sixth-century Björketorp and Stentoften stones.[93] It might also be added that our Middle Welsh attestations of men performing *hud* also involve compromised masculinity.[94] Solli's recent survey of likely reasons for *seiðr*'s associations with *ergi* includes a putative association of *seiðr* with sexual perversion and bodily transformation, the tendency for shamanic practices to involve systematic gender-transgression, and the likelihood that, to co-opt DuBois's phrasing,

> in a culture in which keeping control of one's wits and dealing in a forthright manner were both counted as prime features of masculinity, a complex ritual that entails public trance and possible underhanded manipulation of another's will could only be seen as compromising of the masculine ideal.[95]

These conditions may or may not have held in Anglo-Saxon culture. But it seems clear that two otherworldly males in Scandinavian beliefs did conduct *seiðr*, using it to inflict illness which allowed them to rape or seduce victims. Besides the evidence of *Lokasenna*, Óðinn is attested in stanza 3 of Kormakr

89 Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I 19.
90 DuBois, 'Seiðr', 45.
91 Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 101.
92 Ed. Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke, *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1941–2), cols 116–17 [no. 81].
93 On *argrskapr* and the related *ergi* see Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. Joan Turville-Petre, The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization, 1 ([Odense]: Odense University Press, 1983) (first publ. *Norrønt nid: Forestillingen om den umandige mand i de islandske sagaer* ([Odense]: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1980)), 18–20 *et passim*; regarding the link with *seiðr*, Strömbäck, *Sejd*, esp. 194–6; Almqvist, *Sejd*, 264; Price, *The Viking Way*, 122–3. On the inscriptions see Almqvist, *Sejd*, 252; Moltke, *Runes*, 140–1, 232–7; Solli, *Seid*, 212–16.
94 Roberta L. Valent, 'Gwydion and Aranrhod: Crossing the Borders of Gender in *Math*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 35 (1988), 1–9; Sarah Higley, 'Dirty Magic: Seiðr, Science, and the Parturating Man in Medieval Norse and Welsh Literature', in *Figures of Speech: The Body in Medieval Art, History, and Literature*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen and David A. Robertson, Essays in Medieval Studies, 11 (Chicago: Illinois Medieval Association, 1994), pp. 137–49.
95 Solli, *Seid*, 148–59; Dubois, 'Seiðr', 52.

Ǫgmundarson's *Sigurðarkviða* to have worked *seiðr* upon Rindr.[96] Combining this point with our other evidence for the seduction, principally Saxo Grammaticus's detailed narrative in the *Gesta Danorum*, McKinnell has plausibly reconstructed a narrative in which this *seiðr* specifically involves Óðinn inflicting a fever while disguised as a woman in order to rape Rindr.[97] *Skírnismál* offers another parallel, which may be particularly significant because it concerns Freyr, whom I have argued above to have been associated with the *álfar*. In *Skírnismál*, Freyr is struck with a love-sickness, which according to other sources leads him to give up his sword – both points which compromise Freyr's masculinity.[98] Freyr's proxy Skírnir then seduces Gerðr by invoking a curse which is both generally similar to and verbally connected with the Bergen rune-stave, which is itself, presumably, evidence for men's love-magic.[99] Looking more widely, it is also worth noting that in Marie de France's *Yonec* – from around the 1150s or 1160s, and set in Caerwent, affording a relatively early text with British connections – the otherworldly knight Muldumarec has to transform himself into the form of the lady whom he is attempting to seduce and then claim to be ill, so as to receive the sacrament and prove his Christianity, before he can win her.[100] This is reminiscent of Óðinn's putative infliction of illness on Rindr and his concomitant cross-dressing.

These texts do not contradict Snorri's claim that it was demeaning to a man's masculinity for him to conduct *seiðr*. To this extent, they still suggest that *seiðr* (and potentially, then, *sīden*) was women's business. But they also show clearly that mythological otherworldly males might conduct *seiðr*, trangressing social norms to do so, and in Óðinn's case suffering direct criticism for it. Moreover, these readings actually fit well with my argument that *ælfe* were associated with seductive, feminine beauty: they provide a rich context for inferring that *ælfsīden* carried similar connotations of male gender transgression to *seiðr*. I return to this prospect in the next chapter, linking this reading with the contrast in *Wið fǣrstice* between the largely passive *smiðas* and the active, martial supernatural females.

ÆLFE AND SUPERNATURAL POWER

One last aspect of my comparisons between *ælfsīden* and *seiðr* demands consideration: the evident, if problematic, desirability of this magical power in medieval Scandinavia. This hints that it might be appropriate to consider whether *ælfe* were not merely sources of supernatural harm in Anglo-Saxon belief-systems, but sources of power. *Ælfe*'s capacity to induce mind-altering illnesses may have had a more positive aspect. We have no unequivocal

96 Ed. Finnur Jónsson, *Skjaldedigtning*, B1 69.
97 *Meeting the Other*, 157–9; cf. also *Hárbarðsljóð* st. 20–2, ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 81–2.
98 On lovesickness see Anne Heinrichs, 'Der liebeskranke Freyr, euhemeristisch entmythisiert', *Alvíssmál*, 7 (1997), 3–36; on the sword see McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, p. 65.
99 See von See *et al*., *Kommentar*, 1 136–7.
100 Ed. Ewert, *Marie de France*, 85–6.

Anglo-Saxon evidence for this, but *elves* and *fairies* are clearly attested as sources of supernatural power later in English-speaking culture, so the idea deserves to be pursued. Moreover, we do have an early hint in the Old English word *ylfig*.

Ylfig is attested in a group of textually related glosses on Aldhelm's *Prosa de virginitate* and additionally in the eleventh-century Harley Glossary, which not only includes the Aldhelm gloss, but also adds *ylfig* to another textual tradition. The problems of these glosses are intricate, and I have accordingly analysed the evidence in detail elsewhere.[101] None of our surviving attestations was written before the eleventh century, but the Aldhelm gloss belongs to a textual tradition which goes back at least in part to the eighth century, and so may be old. *Ylfig* could have been a common Old English word or a gloss-coining redeployed by the Harley Glossator – two scenarios which could have profoundly different implications. Etymologically, *ylfig* would appear broadly to mean 'engaged with an *ælf*'; its potential meanings and age are suggested by the word *gydig*, deriving from Common Germanic, whose first element is a phonological variant of *god* and so etymologically seems to mean 'engaged with a *god*'.[102] *Gydig* is attested no earlier than *ylfig* and even more sparsely, but is well attested in Middle English, surviving today as *giddy*, and must on phonological grounds date back to prehistoric Old English. Attested in Old English only as a gloss on *lymphaticus* ('diabolically possessed'), its primary meanings in Middle English were 'insane, crazy; possessed by a devil', which correlate precisely with the Old English and etymological evidence.[103] The possibility that *ylfig* was not a gloss-coining but a member of the common lexicon is consolidated by the fact that it is unusual for the Harley Glossator to add vernacular words to his glosses. It thus seems unlikely that he would extend the use of a unique, vernacular gloss-coining.

There is a general prospect, then, that *ylfig* was a member of the common lexicon, denoting something along the lines of possession by *ælfe*. This is supported by the precise contexts of the gloss's deployment. As a representative of the tradition of Aldhelm-glosses, I quote the *Prosa de virginitate* as edited by Gwara (and as translated by Lapidge and Herren), including the extensive glosses from Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS. 1650, Hand A of which is the relevant stratum:

> Anatolia uero in exilium *[Hand A: on wræcsīþ]* trusa signorum *[Hand C: uel]* miraculis crebrescente *[Hand CD: wīde springende]* praefatam sociam in uirtutibus

[101] 'Elves on the Brain' , pp. 233–43.

[102] Parallel Old English formations are *wērig* ('weary, tired, exhausted' < *wōr* 'ooze, bog'); *sǣlig* ('happy, prosperous' < *sǣl* 'prosperity, happiness'). These suggest '(like) one engaged with noun X': 'like one in a bog', 'one in good fortune'. The Old English root-vowel *y* of *gydig* must derive from the *i*-mutation of */ʏuðiɤ-/, predating the Germanic lowering of /u. . .ɑ/ > /o. . .ɑ/ in *god* (< */ʏuðɑz/; see Campbell, *Grammar*, §§115, 572–3).

[103] Ed. Gwara, *Prosa*, II 704–5; cf. Louis Goossens (ed.), *The Old English Glosses of MS. Brussels, Royal Library, 1650 (Aldhelm's 'De Laudibus Virginitatis')*, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Letteren, 36 (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1974), 461 [no. 4892]; (*MED*, s.v. *gidī*; cf. *OED*, s.v. *giddy*).

> aequiperauit; execrata etenim filium consulis inerguminum *[Hand C: dēouelsēocne]* rigidis catenarum nexibus *[Hand CD: bendum]* asstrictum *[i. ligatum]* expulso habitatore dicto citius curaut. Quo rumore *[fama]* clarescente *[ł crescente]* et laruatos *[Hand A: æfǣrede; Hand C: inerguminos infirmos; Hand CD dēofelsēoce]* et comitiales *[Hand A: i. garritores, ylfie; Hand C: lunaticos, wansēoce]* ac ceteros ualitudinarios *[Hand A: ādlie]* pristinae sanitati restituit . . .[104]
>
> Anatolia, however, forced into exile and becoming famous for her miraculous signs, equalled her aforementioned associate in virtue; for, having cursed the son of a consul who was bound tightly by the rigid links of demoniacal chains, she cured him (again) in the twinkling of an eye by expelling the demon who inhabited him. As her renown became more illustrious, she restored to their former health those possessed (with devils), epileptics and other diseased persons . . .

Here, then, *ylfig*, along with *garritor*, gloss *comitialis*. This is usually translated – as here – with 'epileptic'. This would fit Sloane 2584's juxtaposition of *elphi* with *morbus caducus* mentioned above. However, *comitialis* is an obscure word, almost certainly taken by Aldhelm from the entry in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* for 'Epilemsia', and interpreted by his glossators on that basis.[105] According to Isidore, *epilemsia*

> Fit . . . ex melancholico humore, quotiens exuberaverit et ad cerebrum conversus fuerit. Haec passio et caduca vocatur, eo quod cadens aeger spasmos patiatur. Hos etiam vulgus lunaticos vocant, quod per lunae cursum comitetur eos insidia daemonum. Item et larvatici. Ipse est et morbus comitialis, id est maior et divinus, quo caduci tenentur. Cui tanta vis est ut homo valens concidat spumetque. Comitialis autem dictus, quod apud gentiles cum comitiorum die cuiquam accidisset, comitia dimittebantur. Erat autem apud Romanos comitiorum dies sollennis in kalendis Ianuarii.
>
> is caused by the melancholic humour – how often it may have overflowed and been redirected to the brain. This is called *passio* [suffering] and *caduca* [(epileptic) falling], because the epileptic [*cadens aeger*] suffers [*patiatur*] convulsions. These indeed the common people call *lunatici* [those made mad by the moon], because the attack of demons follows them according to the course of the moon. So also *larvatici*. That too is the comitialian sickness [*morbus comitialis*], which is more significant and of divine origin / to do with divination, by which those who fall are gripped. It has such power that a healthy person collapses and froths. However, *comitialis* is so used because among the pagans, when it had happened to anyone on the day of the *comitia* [assembly for electing Roman magistrates], the *comitia* were broken up. But the usual day of the *comitia* among the Romans was during the Calends of January.

Isidore's discussion is consistent with Aldhelm's association of *comitiales* with *laruati* ('the demonically possessed'). *Ylfig* must, then, denote some altered state of mind – possibly one which was 'maior et divinus'. We may set this alongside its pairing with the Latin gloss *garritor*. This word is even more unusual than *comitialis*, but is a transparent deverbative formation from *garrio*

[104] Ed. Gwara, *Prosa*, II 696–7; cf. Goossens, *The Old English Glosses*, 456–7 [nos 4815–21]; trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1979), 121. Gwara did not assign a hand to one stratum of the glosses in his edition, which do not appear in Goossens's edition, hence the lack of attribution here.

[105] Ed. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi*, 4.7.5–7.

('I chatter, babble, prate'), meaning 'babbler'.[106] More precise connotations of this word as it was understood in Anglo-Latin, however, are suggested by chapter 44 of the *Prosa de virginitate*, which mentions 'a pithonibus et aruspicibus uana falsitatis deleramenta garrientibus' ('empty gibberish of falsity from *garrientes* prophetesses and soothsayers'), suggesting that the root of *garritor* had (pejorative) connotations of prophetic speech.[107] The evidence of the Aldhelm gloss is that *ylfig* not only meant 'divinely possessed', but specifically denoted possession leading to prophecy.

This evidence is consolidated by the other attestation of *ylfig*, on folio 76r of the Harley Glossary. This includes the entry 'Fanaticus .i. minister templi' ('*Fanaticus*: i.e. the priest of a temple') with 'fut*ur*a p*rae*cinens . ł ylfig' ('one foretelling things to come, or *ylfig*') written above.[108] *Ylfig* does not occur in the nearest relatives to this gloss, in the Corpus Glossary, so is probably an addition to the tradition by the Harley Glossator.[109] In the Harley Glossary, only *futura praecinens* and *ylfig* gloss *fanaticus* as adjectives, and the lineation further allies them, so *ylfig* presumably means something like 'foretelling the future' rather than 'priest of a temple'. The correlation between this entry and the Aldhelm gloss may not be independent: if the Harley Glossator took *ylfig* from the *comitialis* gloss he may have inferred an association with prophetic speech in the same way as I have. But the Harley Glossator had an extensive lexicon of mental illness to draw on, and moreover did not usually augment his sources with vernacular glosses: it looks like his choice was a careful and specific one.[110] The parallel with *gydig*, the meanings of *comitialis* and *garritor*, and the Harley Glossator's usage of *ylfig* all militate in favour of understanding *ylfig* as a common word meaning 'one speaking prophetically through divine/demonic possession'.

It follows from these arguments that *ælf* was once sufficiently intimately associated with people predicting the future, and possibly with possession, that a derived adjective meant something like 'predicting the future (through possession by *ælfe*)'. As historians of both epilepsy and nympholepsy have shown, such possession could have attracted a wide range of interpretations and social significations; in the Aldhelm gloss at least, *ylfig* denotes an undesirable situation.[111] Nonetheless, the word points clearly to the prospect that the capacity of *ælfe* to induce altered mental states could have positive outcomes. A hint that similar ideas may have circulated in the early Middle English period is afforded by a gloss, probably made at Worcester, on section

[106] Though see the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975–), s.v. *comitialis*.

[107] Ed. Gwara, *Prosa*, II 625.

[108] Ed. Oliphant, *Glossary*, 178 [F151]; collated with MS.

[109] Ed. Lindsay, *Corpus Glossary*, 74 [F38], 75 [F78]; Bischoff *et al.*, *Glossaries*, f. 28.

[110] Roberts, Kay and Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old English*, §§02.08.09.02 *Epilepsy*, 02.08.11.02.01 *Insanity, madness*.

[111] Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*, 2nd rev. edn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 3–27, 85–102; W. R. Connor, 'Seized by the Nymphs: Nympholepsy and Symbolic Expression in Classical Greece', *Classical Antiquity*, 7 (1988), 155–89.

16 of the eleventh-century text of the Old English *Canons of Edgar* in Bodleian MS Junius 121. The Old English reads:

> And riht is þæt prēosta gehwylc crīstendōm georn lice lære and ælcne hæþendōm mid ealle ādwæsce; and forbēode wyllweorðunga, and līcwīgelunge, and hwata, and galdra, and trēowwurðunga, and stānwurðunga, and ðone dēofles cræft þe man drȳhð þær man þā cild þurh þā eorðan tīhð, and ðā gemearr þe man drīhð on gēares niht on mislicum wīgelungum and on friðsplottum and on ellenum, and on manegum mislicum gedwimerum þe men on drēogað fela þæs þe hī ne sceoldan.[112]

> And it is proper that every priest zealously teach Christianity, and thoroughly eliminate every heathen practice; and forbid the worship of springs, and necromancy, and divination, and charms, and the worship of trees, and the worship of stones, and the Devil's art which is performed, whereby one draws the children through the earth, and the errors which are performed on new year's night in various spells, and in sanctuaries and among elder-trees, and in many and varied delusions, which people perform extensively, even though they must not.

The evidential status of this passage for Anglo-Saxon beliefs is problematic, but the passage itself is not my concern here. Rather, what is of interest is that the glossator glossed *on ellenum* ('among elder-trees') with 'eluene', misunderstanding *ellen* to denote *elves*. He apparently understood something like 'and the error which is performed on new year's night in various spells, and in sanctuaries, and among *elves*'. The fact that the glossator mistakenly used *elf* here suggests that he was influenced by presuppositions that *elves* might be plausible participants in the *gemearr* described. In view of the passage's emphasis on magic and divination, moreover, he may have been encouraged in this by links between *elves* and divination. Unfortunately, neither Fowler, the text's editor, nor Ker explicitly dated the hand of this glossator, but a date around the first half of the thirteenth century is implicit in their discussions; the glossator provides a hint that around this time, *elves* might have been envisaged to be involved in the un-Christian activities of Anglo-Saxon communities in ways other than causing illness.[113]

Either way, the prospect of *ælfe* providing prophetic information is well paralleled by a wide range of close comparative evidence. The idea of supernatural sources of special knowledge was familiar in Christian Anglo-Saxon society: it is ubiquitous in the saints' lives and homilies produced or otherwise circulated in the region. It is not inherently unlikely, then, that certain Anglo-Saxons should have claimed supernatural sources for their powers. *Serglige Con Culainn* associates Cú Chulainn's awakening from his *serglige* with his recitation of a *bríathar-thecosc*, preceptual wisdom which is uncharacteristic of Cú Chulainn himself in the story, and best explained as a beneficial side-effect of his *síde*-inflicted illness.[114] This story exhibits some striking parallels with the confessions of Elspeth Reoch, tried for witchcraft on Orkney in

[112] Ed. Roger Fowler, *Wulfstan's Canons of Edgar*, Early English Text Society, 266 (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 5.
[113] Fowler, *Wulfstan's Canons*, xiii–xiv; Ker, *Catalogue*, 412 [no. 338].
[114] Carey, 'Cú Chulainn'.

1616, and many of the people accused in the Scottish witchcraft trials were healers who, like Elspeth, had claimed *elvis* or *fareis* as the source both of illnesses and of their own powers.[115] Somewhat as in *Serglige Con Culainn*, power from the *fareis* comes in some cases with a *quid pro quo* of harm to the healer's livestock or to their own person. The early-modern Scottish situation is foreshadowed in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century literary texts such as the *Semita recta Albertus peribet testimonium*, *The Wee Wee Man*, *Thomas of Erceldoune* and Andrew Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*, which put prophetic or otherwise arcane information in the mouths of otherworldly beings, and in the trial in Somerset in 1438 of Agnes Hancock, whose powers came allegedly 'a spiritibus aeris, quos vulgus "feyry" appellant' ('from the spirits of the air which the common people call *feyry*').[116] *Thomas of Erceldoune* also recalls Scandinavian comparanda: Thomas's interrogation of his lady at their parting, in the face of her oft-repeated desire to leave, is strikingly reminiscent of Óðinn's interrogation of the *vǫlva* in the Eddaic poem *Baldrs draumar*.[117] Supernatural beings providing wisdom – whether prophetic, as in *Vǫluspá*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Grípisspá*, or concerning healing and protection, as in *Sigrdrífumál* – are prominent in Old Norse poetry; though usually female, they may be male, like Fáfnir in *Fáfnismál* or Óðinn himself in *Grímnismál*.

To what period's beliefs *ylfig* attests is unclear, but together with these later texts it suggests that *ælfe*'s status as sources of supernatural power was firm in the Anglo-Saxon period. The existence of *ælfe* in this role after conversion need not merely represent inertia in belief: access to Christian supernatural power was jealously guarded by a limited group of ritual specialists – monks and priests – but other members of the Anglo-Saxon community might have wanted or needed to claim supernatural power, making non-Christian traditional sources a significant resource. Precisely who the people who drew on *ælfe*'s power might have been is hard to guess. Much has been made of an unusual female burial of perhaps the sixth century from Bidford-upon-Avon identified, plausibly enough, by its grave-goods as a 'cunning-woman', and for the association with female burials of objects identified as 'amuletic'.[118]

[115] Ed. Stuart, *Miscellany*, II pt. I 187–91; cf. Owen Davies, 'A Comparative Perspective on Scottish Cunning-folk and Charmers', in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller (Basingstoke: Palgrave, forthcoming); the case of Stein Maltman, Stirling 1628, ed. Hall, 'Folk-Healing'; that of Isobell Strauthaquhin, Aberdeen 1597, ed. Stuart, *Miscellany*, I 177 ; Hall, 'Continuity'.

[116] Respectively ed. Grund, 'Albertus Magnus'; Thomas Wright, *The Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft: In French Verse, From the Earliest Period to the Death of King Edward I*, Rolls Series, 47, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1866–8), II 452–66; Ingeborg Nixon, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, Publications of the Department of English, University of Copenhagen, 9, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980–3); F. J. Amours, *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun: Printed on Parallel Pages from the Cottonian and Wemyss MSS., with the Variants of the Other Texts*, The Scottish Text Society, 1st series, 50, 53–4, 56–7, 63, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1903–14), IV 276–9; Thomas Scott Holmes, *The Register of John Stafford, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1425–1443: From the Original in the Registry at Wells*, Somerset Record Society, 31–2, 2 vols (London: Harrison, 1915–16), 227.

[117] Ed. Neckel, *Edda*, 277–9.

[118] Surveyed recently by John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 170–5; see especially Tania M. Dickinson, 'An Anglo-Saxon "Cunning Woman"

Likewise, a number of burials with grave-goods overwhelmingly associated with women have been identified on skeletal grounds as male, leading to speculation that early Anglo-Saxon culture included cross-dressing men, and that they might have been ritual specialists; the idea correlates to some extent with Bede's description of the pagan Northumbrian 'primus pontificum' ('chief of bishops') Coifi as being prevented by his station from bearing weapons and riding male horses, and with a thin scatter of other northern European finds and texts.[119] This could in theory provide a remarkable parallel for the evidence for *ælfe*'s own apparent combination of male sex, feminine traits and supernatural power. But the numbers of prospective 'cross-dressing' men in the archaeological record are small enough that they may merely reflect mis-sexing; Bede's account could plausibly be viewed as invention; and neither the male nor female burials can in any case be associated with *ælfe* as such.

from Bidford-on-Avon', in *In Search of Cult: Archaeological Investigations in Honour of Philip Rahtz*, ed. Martin Carver (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), pp. 45–54 (repr. in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England: Basic Readings*, ed. Catherine E. Karlov, Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England, 7 / Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 2086 (London: Garland, 1999), pp. 359–73); Audrey L. Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 96 (Oxford: BAR, 1981); Michael J. Enright, *Lady with a Mead-Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), esp. 109–21.

119 *Historia ecclesiastica* II.13, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, 184–6 at 184; for *pontifex* as 'bishop' see R. I. Page, 'Anglo-Saxon Paganism: The Evidence of Bede', in *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe: Proceedings of the Second Germania Latina Conference Held at the University of Groningen, May 1992*, ed. T. Hofstra, L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald, Mediaevalia Groningana, 16 / Germania Latina, 2 (Groningen: Forsten, 1995), pp. 99–129, at 119. For the English archaeological material see primarily Christopher Knüsel and Kathryn Ripley, 'The *Berdache* or Man-Woman in Anglo-Saxon England and Early Medieval Europe', in *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrrell (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), pp. 157–91; also Nick Stoodley, *The Spindle and the Spear: A Critical Enquiry into the Construction and Meaning of Gender in the Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 288 (Oxford: Hedges/Archaeopress, 1999), 76–7, 218 table 45; S. J. Lucy, 'Housewives, Warriors and Slaves? Sex and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Burials', in *Invisible People and Processes: Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archaeology*, ed. Jenny Moore and Eleanor Scott (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pp. 150–68, at 157–62; Sam Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death: Burial Rites in Early England* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), 89–90; Deborah J. Shepherd, 'The Elusive Warrior Maiden Tradition: Bearing Weapons in Anglo-Saxon Society', in *Ancient Warfare: Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. John Carman and Anthony Harding (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 219–43, at 231–41. For expressions of scepticism see for example, Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Social Structure', 132–3; Tania M. Dickinson, 'What's New in Early Medieval Burial Archaeology?', *Early Medieval Europe*, 11 (2002), 71–87, at 83; Stoodley, *The Spindle*, 10, 33–4. For archaeological evidence from elsewhere see Price, *The Viking Way*, 271–2 (for the promising-looking burial of a man in women's clothes and with other unusual goods at Vivallen); Gry Wiker, 'Om konstruksjon av ny menneskelig identitet i jernalderen', *Primitive tider*, 4 (2001), 51–72 (on gender-blurring in Iron-Age Scandinavian small arts); Solli, *Seid*, 218–31; cf. Bonnie Effros, 'Skeletal Sex and Gender in Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology', *Antiquity*, 74 (2000), 632–9. For texts from elsewhere, the possible meaning of the Old High German *hagazussa* (cognate with *hægtesse*) as 'in weiblicher Kleidung auftretender fahrender Schauspieler, Spielmann' ('a travelling actor, minstrel, performing in women's clothing') may hint that men might have dressed as women in order to be *hagazussan*: *AHDWB*, s.v. *hagazussa* §5. As Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) noted at p. 61, the early-medieval Penitential of Silos includes an intriguing reference within a list concerning incantations, consultation of demons and proscribed healing practices to men who dance wearing women's clothes.

There is one hint at a lexical link between ritual specialists and *ælfe* in our evidence for the significance of the plant known in Old English as *ælfþone*.[120] This word is attested only Bald's Leechbook and Leechbook III, mainly in remedies for fever, madness, or ailments caused by *ælfe*. However, cognate evidence suggests that *ælfþone* denoted woody nightshade (L. *solanum dulcamara*). Meanwhile, Aldhelm's riddle *Elleborus*, which, despite its name, almost certainly describes woody nightshade, shows that Aldhelm considered that the plant, while not entirely depriving people of reason, would make them *insanus*, and that his audience would recognise this phenomenon as characteristic of woody nightshade.[121] It seems fairly unlikely that this cultural knowledge and Aldhelm's decision to allude to it was founded merely on accidental woody nightshade poisonings: the prospect arises, then, that woody nightshade was deliberately consumed for its mind-altering qualities. It is also possible, then, that it bore the name *ælfþone* because it conferred powers somehow related to those of *ælfe*. However, this is not certain, as it is also used in remedies against ailments associated with *ælfe*, so it might be taken to have been named for its power against *ælfe* (cf. *dweorgedwostle*, used against fever). We do not, in any case, know who in Anglo-Saxon society consumed it (except that the effects were familiar to early West-Saxon monks).

Despite the manifest gaps in our understanding, however, the combined Old English evidence, contextualised by later material, suggests something of the potential significance of *ælfe* as a source of supernatural power, hinting at complex interrelationships between *ælfe*'s power to help and their better-attested power to harm. If my interpretations are correct, then *ælf*-beliefs potentially also afforded not only a means to renarrate illness to facilitate its curing, but a means of constructing certain kinds of ailment in a positive way, as sources of knowledge and power in themselves, or perhaps as *quid pro quo*s for such power.

CONCLUSIONS

Ælfsīden and *sīdsa*, then, were probably kinds of magic, closely associated with *ælfe*, just as the cognate Scandinavian *seiðr* was associated with the *vanir*. *Ælfe* evidently used this magic to inflict ailments, which tend to exhibit associations with fever and other mind-altering illnesses; it is associated further with nocturnal assaults by supernatural beings, among them the relatively well-understood *maran*. Although these illnesses were seen as similar to and associated with diabolical afflictions, the writers of our medical texts were evidently not confident that they were the same thing. Meanwhile, early-medieval Irish and slightly later Scandinavian narratives tell of anthropomorphic otherworldly beings seducing or trying to seduce members of the in-group

[120] Hall, 'Madness'.

[121] Ed. Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*, 1 144; see also M. L. Cameron, 'Aldhelm as Naturalist: A Re-examination of Some of his *Enigmata*', *Peritia*, 4 (1985), 117–33, at 131–3; cf. *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, 110–12.

by magically inflicting altered states of mind, or otherwise inflicting ailments in the context of sexual contact. Both Irish and Scandinavian material affords close parallels for the assault of a *mære*. This is well paralleled by the description of *elves* in the late-thirteenth-century *South English Legendary*, emphasising its potential relevance to English culture. These texts parallel the prominent features of those Old English medical texts mentioning *ælfsīden*, and our evidence for *ælfe* generally: anthropomorphicity, seductiveness, and magically inflicted fever and hallucination.

The idea that *ælfe* in the medical texts were like Judaeo-Christian-Mediterranean demons, incompatible with beautiful anthropomorphic beings, is not disproved by this comparative material, and could indeed have held for some Anglo-Saxons. But I have shown that it is unnecessary: causing illness or altered mental states is a core part of the narratives of the otherworldly beings Drífa, Fann, Skírnir and Óðinn. These texts also emphasise the extent to which such traditions could be maintained among the Latin-literate, clerical elite in Christianised medieval societies. *Serglige Con Culainn*'s effort to incorporate its *síde* into Christian constructions of the supernatural world conspicuously fails to convince; the unresolved tensions between Christian and traditional belief which it shows for medieval Ireland offers a paradigm for the uneasy pairings of *ælf* with *dēofol* or *fēond* in the Old English medical texts. Admittedly, most available medieval comparisons for *ælfsīden* concern female otherworldly beings, but I have identified enough similar narratives of males to show that we should not necessarily assume that *ælfsīden* must have been conducted by females. The prominence of females does, however, contextualise my discussion in the next chapter of *ælfe*'s gendering, and the potential significance of the rise of a female denotation of *ælf* during the Old English period.

These comparisons provide plausible models through which we can interpret both *ælfsīden* and the place of *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon conceptions of illness which are broadly consistent with those outlined for prehistoric Anglo-Saxon culture in chapters 2 and 3. Although a threat to members of the in-group, the otherworldly beings in my comparative texts seem to threaten only individuals, mainly in response to those individuals' transgressions. In this way, they do not threaten society as a whole and, moreover, help to uphold its values and structures by punishing those who transgress them. There is also reason to think that *ælfe*'s powers to inflict altered mental states could be constructed not only as powers to harm, but as positive and useful, suggesting that *ælfe*'s interventions in society were not merely negative. *Ælfe* may, indeed, have had a role in wider Anglo-Saxon constructions of magic or supernatural power. The word *ylfig* suggests that at some stage in Anglo-Saxon culture, possession by *ælfe* was a source of prophetic knowledge with sufficient cultural prominence to be lexicalised, and similar beings certainly had similar roles in early Irish literature and in later English society.

6

Anglo-Saxon Myth and Gender

THIS book has focused primarily on reconstructing Anglo-Saxons' beliefs concerning *ælfe*. In this process, I have sought to preserve evidence for variation and change, but also to use comparative material to show that our disparate Anglo-Saxon data may be surface manifestations of more cohesive underlying concepts. I have also been able, at various stages, to suggest how beliefs concerning *ælfe* may have been important in the construction of social identity, health and healing. One theme, however, relating both to questions of cohesiveness and of the relationships between belief and society, has been left to one side as I have accumulated the scattered evidence for it: *ælfe*'s gender, and particularly their feminine characteristics. It seems that early Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* were prototypically male – my key arguments here being in chapter 3 – but that they were associated with traits which Anglo-Saxons considered effeminate. In chapter 1, I reassessed the evidence for Vǫlundr, a Scandinavian *álfr* with Anglo-Scandinavian connections, arguing that his masculinity is compromised throughout *Vǫlundarkviða*, and specifically that his white neck connotes feminine beauty. In chapter 3, I showed that Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* were paradigmatically associated with seductive, feminine beauty, and in chapter 5 that they were intimately linked with *sīden*, whose Scandinavian counterpart *seiðr* could not be conducted by men without compromising their masculinity and which was itself associated with seduction. Gender issues prove prominent in comparative medieval texts relating to otherworldly beings. What, then, does *ælfe*'s effeminacy mean? Moreover, by the eleventh century, *ælf* seems comfortably to have denoted females as well as males, a development which also demands interpretation. This chapter draws these issues together to make a more integrated case for change in Anglo-Saxon non-Christian beliefs, and some more specific suggestions as to how these beliefs may have related to Anglo-Saxon society. I read *ælfe*'s effeminacy as part of a systematic gender inversion in early Anglo-Saxon mythologies. This approach helps us to key the textual and linguistic evidence for *ælfe* into a wider history of Anglo-Saxon society and cultural change.

The prospect of using the evidence for *ælfe* as evidence for the history of Anglo-Saxon gendering is daunting, not least because it involves projecting closely reasoned conclusions drawn from difficult evidence into another evidentially problematic, and ideologically charged, area. In some other fields – such as medieval Scandinavia or the ancient Hellenic world – nineteenth-century historians' assumptions about gendering eventually proved

incompatible with the primary sources, and were duly revised.[1] But the Anglo-Saxon written sources challenge traditional assumptions less obviously, and our perspectives on women's positions in Anglo-Saxon culture are concomitantly limited.[2] Serious efforts have begun in recent years to redress this, but the historiography is in a process of transition, meaning that although I have shown above that stories of otherworldly beings in Scandinavia and Ireland related to discourses of gender, there is no firm framework in which to assess new Anglo-Saxon evidence.[3] Recent work has adduced under-used texts such as penitentials, and utilised cultural and critical theory to try to penetrate the ideologically dominant discourses of Anglo-Saxon writers to assess what they conceal and reveal about the constructions of gender which they sought to control. What the evidence assembled above allows us to do is return to issues of Anglo-Saxon gendering from a new standpoint. I neither claim nor intend to offer definitive or exclusive interpretations of the data. Rather, the evidence for *ælfe* encourages us to ask new questions and to seek new answers.

The key text for trying to interpret *ælfe*'s femininity is inevitably *Wið fǽrstice*, which situates *ælfe* in a comparatively fully articulated system of belief. *Wið fǽrstice* shares this only with *Beowulf*, but unlike *Beowulf* is unlikely to represent a detached theologising of mythological material. It is a practical text, whose expressions of mythology are directed not to shaping belief, but to facilitating

1 See Price, *The Viking Way*, 76–89; David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin, 'Introduction', in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 3–20.

2 Hugh Magennis, '"No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons"? Attitudes to Sexuality in Old English Prose and Poetry', *Leeds Studies in English*, 26 (1995), 1–27; Roberta Frank, 'Sex in the *Dictionary of Old English*', in *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.*, ed. Mark C. Amodio and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 302–12.

3 The seminal study of Anglo-Saxon women was Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984). Pauline Stafford, 'Women and the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 4 (1994), 221–49, marks a revisionist shift. For some major contributions see Allen J. Frantzen, 'Where the Boys are: Children and Sex in the Anglo-Saxon Penitentials', in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, The New Middle Ages, 4 / Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 2066 (New York: Garland, 1997), pp. 43–66; *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from 'Beowulf' to 'Angels in America'* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Clare A. Lees. and Gillian R. Overing, 'The Clerics and the Critics: Misogyny and the Social Symbolic in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 19–39; Taylor, *Sharing Story*, 33–52; Malcolm Godden, 'The Trouble with Sodom: Literary Responses to Sexuality', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 77 no. 3 (Autumn 1995), 97–119. For work on gender and the Benedictine reformists see further Stafford, 'Queens', 3–35; Catherine Cubitt, 'Virginity and Misogyny in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), 1–32; Foot, *Veiled Women*, esp. 1 85–110; Andrew Wareham, 'The Transformation of Kinship and the Family in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2001), 375–99; cf. Rohini Jayatilaka, 'The Old English Benedictine Rule: Writing for Women and Men', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 147–87. See also the late and, in origin, non-Anglo-Saxon – but at times refreshingly lewd – *Carmina Cantabrigensia* (ed. and trans. Jan M. Ziolkowski, *The Cambridge Songs ('Carmina Cantabrigensia')*, The Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series A, 66 (Garland: New York, 1994)).

healing by working with and within a belief-system. *Wið færstice* juxtaposes *ælfe* with armed and violent women, *hægtessan*, who are well paralleled in early-medieval north-west European evidence.[4] *Wið færstice* ostentatiously inverts everyday Anglo-Saxon gendering. Weapon-bearing was associated with masculinity, and freedom, at profound and ideological levels.[5] This is not to say that all men could bear weapons, or that weapon-bearing was in practice characteristic of all males; but the fact that in *Wið færstice*, it is women who bear and use weapons represents a striking transgression of gender norms. Admittedly, if we are to identify the poem's *smiðas* with the *ælfe*, then *ælfe* are associated with a distinctively male activity – but the contrast between the male smiths and the female warriors does not flatter the smiths' masculinity. That this juxtaposition was not unique to the charm is suggested by a similar juxtaposition in Issobel Gowdie's seventeenth-century confessions to witchcraft and by hints that *álfar* and *dísir* were also systematically juxtaposed as male and female counterparts in Norse traditions.[6] We do not simply have evidence, then, that in Anglo-Saxon belief *ælfe* were effeminate: we also find them juxtaposed with *hægtessan* who are in important respects masculine, arguably as co-authors of supernatural harm, in what is conceivably a structured pairing.

We can interpret this contrast between effeminate *ælfe* and martial *hægtessan* as a feature in a system of belief, whereby otherworldly beings were believed to trangress the gender boundaries experienced in everyday life. These otherworldly beings, then, were not an idealised image of society or a straightforward model of proper behaviour. But nor were they monsters – though there may, of course, have been a degree of ambiguity about these categories. Rather, we may understand *ælfe* and *hægtessan* as society's mirror-image: in the mirror, we do not see ourselves distorted, but we do see ourselves, on one axis, inverted. Brief though *Wið færstice*'s portrayal is, this reading provides a powerful paradigm for interpreting the effeminacy of *ælfe* and, of course, the martiality of *hægtessan*.

[4] See chapter 1; on Ireland W. M. Hennessy, 'The Ancient Irish Goddess of War', *Revue Celtique*, 1 (1870–2), 27–57; Charles Donahue, 'The Valkyries and the Irish War-Goddesses', *PMLA*, 56 (1941), 1–12; Máire Herbert, 'Transmutations of an Irish Goddess', in *The Concept of the Goddess*, ed. Sandra Billington and Miranda Green (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 141–51, esp. 146–9; for Wales the references in Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems', in *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, ed. Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and Brynley F. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 33–71, at 44–5; the *Vita I Samsonis* there cited is now ed. and trans. Pierre Flobert, *La vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol* (Paris: CNRS, 1997)).

[5] The gendering is clear in early Anglo-Saxon burial assemblages, weapons correlating with male skeletons and weaving-kit with female – though not all burials are equipped with either: Stoodley, *The Spindle*, esp. 77–80. Likewise, Old English specified male *menn* with *wǣpnedmann* ('armed person'), as opposed to *wīfmann* ('woman-person'); one's patrilineal ancestry was the *sperehealf* or *sperehand* ('spear-side'), as opposed to *spinelhealf* ('spindle-side'). A variety of sources point to the further ideological association of weapon-bearing with freedom: N. P. Brooks, 'Arms, Status and Warfare in Late-Saxon England', in *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. David Hill, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 59 (Oxford: BAR, 1978), pp. 81–103, at 82–3.

[6] See above, pp. 114–15; 29, 31.

It is worth noting that although the system which I read here cannot be neatly paralleled in later English evidence, it is reminiscent of later evidence concerning *elves* and *elvis* in the limited sense that Middle English and Older Scots evidence tends to make the *Elf-Queen*, *Queen of Fearrie*, or similar, the dominant power of her world, even when – as in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* – it is evident that there were also male *elves* in her dominion. This female dominance of the other world inverts the usual patterns of rulership in medieval English and Scottish society. Accordingly, rebels in Kent around 1450 were styling themselves 'servants of the queen of the fairies'.[7] Item 9 of the indictment of Andro Man, an Aberdeenshire healer executed for witchcraft in 1598, reads

> thow affermis that the elphis hes shapes and claythis lyk men, and that thay will have fair coverit taiblis, and that they ar bot schaddowis, bot are starker {stronger} nor men, and that thay have playing and dansing quhen thay pleas; and als that the quene is verray plesand, and wilbe auld and young quhen scho pleissis; scho mackis any kyng quhom scho pleisis, and lyis with any scho lykis.[8]

The evidence of Andro's indictment is not without its complexities – but were these words put into his mouth by his prosecutors, they would surely have given a more conventional description of the Witches' Sabbat.[9] 'Being bot a young boy' sixty years before his trial, Andro had been born perhaps only ten or fifteen years after Martin Luther nailed up his ninety-five theses in 1517, and perhaps thirty before Scotland's official reformation in 1560, and for present purposes his evidence makes the point clearly: the world of the *elvis* which he depicts here was like his own, but marked with a key gender inversion. His evidence implies major changes from the system which I read in our Anglo-Saxon sources, but it is one which maintains the principle of defining the gendering of the in-group by demonstrating what it was not.

Simple though my interpretation of *Wið fǽrstice* is, it is important to be clear about what it assumes. Even the categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine' gender in Anglo-Saxon culture are questionable. Clover has argued that in early-medieval Scandinavian cultures, before Christianisation and what she tentatively called 'medievalisation' prompted a departure on the long road towards the alignment of gender with sex, gender could better be divided into the two groups *hvatr* and *blauðr*. *Hvatr* meant 'bold, independent, powerful, vigorous, sharp' and *blauðr* 'weak, soft, powerless, yielding'.[10] The alignment had more to do with power and independence than biological sex, but aristocratic men dominated the *hvatr* group, and women the *blauðr* group. Although this approach is certainly useful, the terms *masculine* and *feminine* remain conventional in work on Anglo-Saxon gendering, and have generally proved appropriate labels for objectively observable groupings in

7 Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 66–8.
8 Ed. Stuart, *Miscellany*, I 121.
9 Cf. Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 133–9, and more generally P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, 'Witchcraft and the Kirk in Aberdeenshire, 1596–97', *Northern Scotland*, 18 (1998), 1–14; Julian Goodare, 'The Aberdeenshire Witchcraft Panic of 1597', *Northern Scotland*, 21 (2001), 17–37.
10 Clover, 'Regardless of Sex'.

Anglo-Saxon societies.[11] But Clover's article provides important caveats.

More specifically – to recast a caveat from the Introduction – *Wið fǣrstice* and my reading of it may be representative only of a limited section of society, which may or may not have successfully fostered its ideologies among other groups. *Wið fǣrstice*'s concern with weapon-bearing looks male and aristocratic in its orientation. My assumption of symmetricality in male and female mythological gender transgression is reminiscent of Bynum's argument that in later-medieval sources, men 'use images of reversal to express liminality', one of the main reversals being in gender. The male experience of liminality or crisis could involve adopting feminine traits. Moreover, men 'tended to assume that reversal was symmetrical . . . men writing about women assumed that women went through sharp crises and conversions and that their liminal moments were accompanied by gender reversal'.[12] This provides a neat parallel to my reading: male, noble Anglo-Saxons construed the liminality of the supernatural beings around their societies through gender reversal. In liminal space, males were seductively beautiful and worked magic, and females bore and used weapons. But Bynum also argued that women and other less powerful groups in fact did not experience liminality as gender reversal.[13] If my model of a belief-system involving systematic gender inversion holds, then, it may do so only for the aristocratic men who created our sources.

These considerations suggest one way in which early Anglo-Saxon gender was maintained. But we can also detect change in this system. At some point in the early Middle Ages, female equivalents of male *ælfe* gained prominence in Anglo-Saxon belief-systems, attested first as equivalents of *nymphae*. Around the eighth century, at least in written registers, there seems to have been no common Old English word for a nymph-like female, or a female *ælf*. But by around 1200, La3amon's female *aluen* enjoyed supernatural powers to shape the child Arthur's future and to heal him in their otherworld over the sea.[14] By the time when Edward I commissioned his own round table, *elven~elves* were seducing men and dancing through woods and meadows. How early this change began is hard to guess, but I have been able to demonstrate that it appeared in writing by the early eleventh century: we are dealing with a specifically Anglo-Saxon cultural development. It may also be added to the growing evidence that, contrary to older views, we are not to look to the Norman Conquest to explain major changes in English gendering.

11 For example, Stoodley, *The Spindle*, admittedly without reference to Clover's work. For developments of Clover's approaches see for example Alex Woolf, 'At Home in the Long Iron Age: A Dialogue between Households and Individuals in Cultural Reproduction', in *Invisible People and Processes: Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archaeology*, ed. Jenny Moore and Eleanor Scott (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pp. 68–74; Whitney, 'Witches'; Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'De-gendering Female Violence: Merovingian Female Honour as an "Exchange of Violence"', *Early Medieval Europe*, 11 (2002), 1–18.

12 Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality', in *Anthropology and the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert L. Moore and Frank E. Reynolds (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1984), pp. 105–25, at 110, 111.

13 'Women's Stories', 112–18.

14 Cf. Edwards, 'La3amon's Elves'.

Detecting whether there may be a link between developments in the gendering of *ælfe* and changes in Anglo-Saxon society is difficult. The history of Anglo-Saxon women is overwhelmingly the history of queens and nuns. Neither group need be very representative of women and femininity generally, and while their positions in Anglo-Saxon society changed over time, the reasons for this and so its significance for the history of gender relations are hard to disentangle.[15] We also know too little about the origins of the female *elven*. Their emergence could represent the adoption of a popular belief by the aristocracy or of women's belief by men; alternatively, they may have arisen as an innovation in aristocratic society, representing one of many strategies whereby this group effected social change. Nor – as is emphasised by the recounting of the stories about the *áes síde* in Ireland, discussions of *elven* in the *South English Legendary*, and the prominence of *ælfe* in *Wið fǣrstice* – does the non-Christian character of these beliefs mean that churchmen were not involved in their development or propagation. However, obscure though the rise of female *elven* is, the prominence of otherworldly females across high-medieval Europe suggests that we are dealing with a general trend in, or an English alignment with, wider medieval European culture. Moreover, although the evidence is scanty, this seems likely to have been part of wider reshaping of beliefs. Two relevant developments may be hypothesised: the stripping of gender-transgressing features from male *elven~elves*, aligning their characteristics with masculine ones; and the decline in traditions of martial supernatural females. Our medieval evidence is too scanty for us to be sure of either of these developments, and the correlation of *Wið fǣrstice* with Issobel Gowdie's seventeenth-century witchcraft confessions in particular show how slowly beliefs must have changed in some sections of society. However, Chaucer equated his one male *elf* with an *incubus* – an active, violent and demonic being.[16] That male *elves* continued to cause ailments was consistent with the behaviour of indubitably masculine demons. Although the male *elves* which crop up in the Scottish witchcraft trials are sometimes dominated by their queen, they do not seem effeminate. This provides enough evidence to guess, at least, that late Anglo-Saxon, male *ælfe* were on a road to losing their more markedly feminine traits.

As for the weapon-bearing women, the words *hægtesse*, and to a lesser extent its partial synonym *wælcyrige*, were to have long histories in English, but are poorly attested in Middle English, so it is hard to trace changes in their meanings; their apparent decline may owe more to restructuring in the Middle English lexicon than to wider cultural change. However, although martial, otherworldly women did enjoy a long life in medieval literature

[15] On queens see Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London; Batsford, 1983); Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); on nuns Foot, *Veiled Women*, 1 esp. 30–4, 61–84.

[16] *Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 857–81, ed. Benson, *Riverside Chaucer*, 116–17; cf. Dorothy Yamamoto, '"Noon oother incubus but he": Lines 878–81 in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*', *Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism*, 28 (1993–4), 275–8, and the similar Middle High German meanings of *alp*.

– and only partly because of the revival of Classical traditions of Amazons – otherworldly females whose femininity is not compromised by weapon-bearing are far more prominent.[17] The power of otherworldly females to seduce and patronise heroes suggested by Norse and Irish evidence for martial otherworldly females is still attested in high-medieval Britain. But while this assistance may constitute advice or magical objects (as with Rhiannon in the Middle Welsh *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet*), finance (as with the anonymous otherworldly woman in Marie de France's *Lanval*), or beneficial prophesying and healing (as with Argante and her *elven* in La3amon's *Brut*), it never extends to offering a helping hand in battle: the closest these otherworldly females come to gender transgression is in their occasional achievement of the sovereignty which all their sex, we are told, desire.[18] We have just enough continuity of evidence in Ireland from early-medieval to modern times to trace how traditions of the valkyrie-like *badb* were absorbed into traditions of non-martial *síde*-women there; some similar development must probably be assumed for Scandinavia.[19] Perhaps the *meyjar* of *Vǫlundarkviða*, whose lack of weaponry is probably one reason why they have so long been excluded from histories of Scandinavian supernatural females, lie at the cusp of this change in Anglo-Scandinavian aristocratic culture: they lack the ostentatious armaments of Eddaic heroines like Sigrún, their seductiveness consequently gaining a new prominence, but they retain their formidable power to protect men and determine the course of men's actions.

It would appear, then, that in aristocratic discourses at least, the martial *hægtessan* of *Wið færstice* and our early glosses were gradually losing their prominence and significance in England during the medieval period. The decline of martial otherworldly females which I have sketched fits neatly with Clover's hypothesis of a process of 'medievalisation' in gendering, whereby Europe's Iron Age societies, to which gender transgression was ideologically important and empowering, developed into the medieval societies whose concern was rather to align gender with sex.[20] If the Irish situation is anything to go by, however, these *hægtessan* did not leave a vacuum in belief systems: their place was taken by ideologically more acceptable replacements. In England, it is not unlikely that this replacement was the female *elven*. No

17 In addition to Icelandic literature, which may have been unusually conservative (see, for example, Carol J. Clover, 'Warrior Maidens and Other Sons', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 85 (1986), 35–49; Kroesen, 'Valkyries'), the story of the powerful, unmarried queen who kills her suitors or has them killed is prominent in the late-thirteenth-century *Nibelungenlied* (âventiuren 6–7; ed. Helmut De Boor, *Das Nibelungenlied: Nach der Ausgabe von Karl Bartsch*, 20th edn (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1972), 60–85) and occurs in the *Lai Doon*, surviving in a late-thirteenth-century manuscript (ed. G. Paris, 'Lais inédits: de Tyolet, de Guingamor, de Doon du Lecheor et de Tydorel', *Romania*, 8 (1879), 29–72, at 61–4). On traditions of Amazons see Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), esp. 18–26, 76–84; Helen Solterer, 'Figures of Female Militancy in French Literature', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 16 (1991), 522–49. For non-martial, otherworldly females, see chapter 5 n. 85.

18 *Wife of Bath's Tale*, lines 1037–40; ed. Benson, *Riverside Chaucer*, 119.

19 Patricia Lysaght, *The Banshee: The Irish Supernatural Death-Messenger*, 2nd edn (Dublin: O'Brien, 1996), 191–218.

20 'Regardless of Sex', esp. 385–6.

longer expressing gender norms by mythological inversion, Anglo-Saxons increasingly construed femaleness by constructing paragons of femininity: beautiful, seductive, unarmed but magically empowered otherworldly *elven*.

In this interpretation, Anglo-Saxon gender norms do not change substantially. Rather, the means by which they are constructed change. But a change in the means by which gender was constructed inevitably had effects on the ways in which gender could be performed. As I mentioned in chapter 5, magically empowered *ælfe* could have afforded a paradigm for men to adopt magic normally associated with women – but at present we have no reliable evidence to support this.[21] But it is tempting to speculate that the putative displacement of martial *hægtessan* by female *elven* relates to two other, slightly more traceable, developments in Anglo-Saxon culture: a decline in nuns' autonomy and changing attitudes towards sexual behaviour. The power and autonomy of *virgines* – unmarried or once-married chaste women – in the early Anglo-Saxon Church is striking.[22] Suggesting that this power was paralleled in non-Christian beliefs, and later curtailed, has unfortunate overtones of the narratives still circulating in Norse scholarship whereby mythological women are understood as echoes of some prehistoric matriarchy.[23] But although the argument that martial females in Old Norse literature echo the (one-time) capacity of unmarried or widowed women in certain circumstances to become culturally male may hold water, we have no reliable evidence for Anglo-Saxon institutions of this sort.[24] Archaeological evidence for weapon-bearing Anglo-Saxon women is fragile, though slightly better paralleled by textual evidence than the idea of men in women's clothes.[25] No simple cut-off for the

21 See pp. 144–55.

22 Veronica Ortenberg, 'Virgin Queens: Abbesses and Power in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 59–68, esp. 64 n. 16.

23 For example, Anne Heinrichs, '*Annat er várt eðli*: The Type of the Prepatriarchal Woman in Old Norse Literature', in *Structures and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, ed. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1986), pp. 110–40, esp. 113–14, 140; Jochens, *Images*, esp. 34–5. For the seminal critique of such ideas see Joan Bamberger, 'The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society', in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 263–80. It is worth noting, however, that Stephen O. Glosecki, '*Beowulf* and the Wills: Traces of Totemism?', *The Heroic Age*, 5 (2001), <http://members.aol.com/heroicage1/homepage.html>, accessed 31 March 2006) has offered a careful case for a degree of matriarchy in the early Germanic-speaking world.

24 Clover, 'Warrior Maidens'.

25 The perceived monstrosity of Grendel's mother has often been played down, her violent avenging of Grendel being argued to owe something to older traditions permitting women to take vengeance in the absence of eligible males (for example, Christian Alfano, 'The Issue of Feminine Monstrosity: A Reevaluation of Grendel's Mother', *Comitatus*, 23 (1992), 1–16; Chance, *Woman as Hero*, 99–107; Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow*, 46); the subject matter of the Old English poems *Judith* and *Elene* and the aplomb with which the heroines take on martial masculine identities has also been attributed to the same origins (Damico, *ibid*., esp. 26–7, 34–40; Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, 'Cynewulf's Autonomous Women: A Reconsideration of Elene and Juliana', in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 222–32).

prominent place of women in the early Anglo-Saxon Church can be argued: as Ortenburg emphasised, women without husbands have continued, as a rule, to have more power than married women in English cultures, and Foot has shown both that the decline in female religious life during the Anglo-Saxon period was not as extensive as it once seemed and that its causes and effects were probably complex.[26] Despite all these caveats, however, it is possible that the power and independence of the armed supernatural females of which we have hints in Anglo-Saxon beliefs afforded mythological paradigms for certain independent actions by early Anglo-Saxon women, attested in the power of women in the early Anglo-Saxon Church, and that the diminution of nuns' power is reflected in the rise of *elven* in Anglo-Saxon beliefs.

Turning to sexuality, we cannot tell how far martial, supernatural Anglo-Saxon females were also associated with seduction, but it does seem likely that their loss of martiality if nothing else encouraged a shift in emphasis towards seductiveness. It is difficult to guess how far women were seen as a sexual threat to men in early Anglo-Saxon culture. It is easy to suppose a general ideological trend in early-medieval Europe whereby women and sex were increasingly both seen as a threat and ever more intimately linked with one another, but hard evidence is thin on the ground.[27] Felix, partly modelling his *vita* of the Anglo-Saxon Guthlac on Evagrius's *Vita Sancti Antonii* in the eighth century, dispensed completely with the sexual temptations which Anthony endured.[28] This might reflect incompatibility with a culture which did not expect women either to take the sexual initiative, or to pose a threat to men if they did; if so, it would be consistent with a pattern for which Cormak and Jochens have argued in early Christian Scandinavia.[29] But Kurtz viewed it simply as an example of Anglo-Saxon prudishness, and he may have been right. Anglo-Saxon laws punishing only male seductors, abductors or rapists need not suggest that women were not also punished for their parts in such events, merely that they were outside patterns of reparation; Edward and Guthrum's proscriptions against *hōrcwenan* and the appearance of mutilation and the stripping of property for adulteresses in the law-code II Cnut could represent our first codifications rather than innovations.[30] But, taken at face value, evidence of this sort does suggest a growing concern with formally regulating the roles of women in lay sexual activity.[31] This can be paralleled, for example, by increasing opposition in Anglo-Saxon society to concubinage, which probably also reflects changing attitudes towards men's

In the historical period, some female rulers oversaw if they did not lead military actions: see for example Stafford *Queens*, 117–20. Nevertheless, one hesitates to build an argument on such disputable ground.

26 Ortenberg, 'Virgin Queens', 68; Foot, *Veiled Women*, esp. 1 61–84.

27 For example, Morris, *Sorceress or Witch?*, esp. 129–53.

28 Benjamin P. Kurtz, *From St. Antony to St. Guthlac: A Study in Biography*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 12.2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1926), pp. 103–46, at 110–13.

29 M. Cormak, '"Fjǫlkunnigri kono scalltu í faðmi sofa": Sex and the Supernatural in Icelandic Saints' Lives', *Skáldskaparmál*, 2 (1992), 221–8; Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 77–8.

30 Edward and Guthrum no. 11; Cnut no. 53, ed. Liebermann, *Gesetze*, 1 134–5, 348–9.

31 See further Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, 142–4.

sexuality.[32] It seems likely that Christianisation introduced concepts of sin, and associations of sin with sexual behaviour, which had not previously existed in Anglo-Saxon culture and would both have encouraged the idea of female seductiveness as a spiritual threat to men, and the idea that male sexuality needed to be constrained.[33] If so, then the rise of female *elven* in Anglo-Saxon beliefs may reflect new constructions of the danger posed by women and by male sexual desire to men's spiritual well-being – a purpose to which they were certainly put in the *South English Legendary*, paralleled in early-medieval Ireland by *Serglige Con Culainn*. Christianisation is unlikely, however, to be the whole story: thus, for example, the decline in gender-blurring images on Iron-Age Scandinavian small arts analysed by Wiker dates to around the sixth century, long before Scandinavia's conversion.[34] Christianisation was only one of many forces behind Europe's 'medievalisation', and may be as much a symptom as a cause.

There are, then, contexts in which we can understand the rise of female *ælfe~elven*, principally a drive in Anglo-Saxon culture over time more rigorously to align sex with gender. Their appearance may also relate to the gradual curtailment of women's power and independence, and possibly with more extensive study of Anglo-Saxon gender history, this idea will become testable. Difficult though it is, our evidence for *ælfe* provides a rare and valuable new perspective on an important and intractable area of Anglo-Saxon history.

32 Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', *Past and Present*, 108 (August 1985), 3–34.

33 Cf. Fell, *Women*, 64; Tom Shippey, 'Wicked Queens and Cousin Strategies in *Beowulf* and Elsewhere', *The Heroic Age*, 5 (2001), <http://www.heroicage.org/>, accessed 31 March 2006, para 15.

34 'Menneskelig identitet'.

7

Believing in Early-Medieval History

AS I emphasised in the foreword to this book, it is the product of study in three different countries: Scotland, England and Finland. Working in Scotland was to work at a mid-way point between two extremes in folklore research, which provide a context for reflecting on how this book has used and developed existing paradigms for studying medieval beliefs. Despite the seminal importance of the English Folklore Society for the establishment of folklore as a discipline in Europe – such that even Finns today study *folkloristiikka* – folklore has never gained more than a marginal position in English academia, whereas Finland has been at the forefront of folklore studies since the nineteenth century.[1] The reasons for this must be numerous, but England's nineteenth-century self-image as the acme of progress, and its concern to situate itself culturally in contradistinction to its colonies, contrasts with the concurrent nation-building in what was then the Grand Duchy of Finland, within the Russian Empire, which had no previous history of nationhood. Scotland, as I perceive it, offered an academic culture historically dominated by British / Southern English agendas, but shaped also by moves towards distinctively national agendas like those of Finland or (more self-consciously) Scotland's neighbouring ex-colonies, Ireland and Norway. I have, of course, been at pains here to emphasise that the present study cannot claim to be a study of folklore in any obvious sense – our evidence for *ælfe* comes from educated and, by inference, probably generally aristocratic men – but historiographically the field has been perceived otherwise, and the position of folklore in English academia partly explains why *ælfe* have generally found only a marginal place in Anglo-Saxon historiography, and then usually only as a curiosity. One hundred and fifty years after Thomas Keightley's admission that 'writing and reading about Fairies some may deem to be the mark of a trifling turn of mind', one notes a certain satisfying continuity with *ælfe*'s capacity a millennium before to destabilise the rational, masculine mind; but one also shares his concern.[2]

Medieval Europe, not being a well-represented field in Finnish source-material, has not attracted a great deal of attention from Finnish folklorists. Nonetheless, it is telling that the footnotes to a book about Anglo-Saxon beliefs lie thickest beneath its discussions of medieval Scandinavia. The willingness

1 Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, *Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), 46–50, 79–82.

2 Keightley, *Fairy Mythology*, vii.

of Scandinavian scholars to bring textual, archaeological and anthropological approaches together in the intensive investigation of non-Christian medieval Scandinavian beliefs has afforded a wealth of methodological and interpretative models, which have often inspired the directions taken in this study. But it would not be fair to reckon intellectual currents only in terms of nationalities; thus many of the scholars of medieval Scandinavian beliefs cited in this book are not themselves Scandinavians. Accordingly, despite the institutional disincentives to the study of folklore in Britain, one hopes that it is at least no longer necessary to justify the historical investigation of non-Christian beliefs in theory. I have emphasised here *ælfe*'s importance as mechanisms for the expression and operation of ideologies which structured Anglo-Saxon communities, and so for our understanding of broad and prominent historical issues. Likewise, 'Beings neither angelic, human, nor animal' now haunt even the New Oxford History of England, while the slow but sure emergence into the historical mainstream of another field whose thinking I have found stimulating, the early-modern European witchcraft trials, is well known.[3] Although the rise of work on the witchcraft trials was originally motivated less by a disciplinary interest in the history of beliefs or world-views *per se* than by a traditional concern to explain the causation of certain prominent events on the landscape of the documentary record, its subsequent progress reflects wider changes in the historical discipline. These observations point to a further, more fundamental reason for the marginalisation of non-Christian beliefs in recent scholarship on Anglo-Saxon England: their marginalisation in the dominant textual culture of Anglo-Saxon society, and the consequent difficulty of accessing them through conventional methods. And if the documentary record for early-medieval non-Christian belief is a desert, then it is one strewn with the skeletons of past travellers and the beasts which carried their ideological baggage – amply so to warn off adventurers of any nationality.[4]

However, as Schmitt wrote of medieval popular belief in 1979, 'it is not so much the documents that are lacking as the conceptual instruments necessary to understand them', and for Anglo-Saxon England at least, his words ring true.[5] Studies of beliefs – present and past – have tended to focus on narrative sources (Schmitt's own being an example), and there is a dearth of narratives involving non-Christian supernatural beings in most of early-medieval Europe. There are good reasons for the emphasis on narratives: they are fundamental to human communication, probably to human cognition, and certainly to history-writing. It is interesting, then, that the extensive historiographical thinking which has surrounded this realisation in the last few decades has travelled under the banner of 'the linguistic turn'. What historians usually

3 Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075–1225* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 686–92.

4 Cf. the warning sign erected at the desert's edge: Eric Gerald Stanley, *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past: 'The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism' and 'Anglo-Saxon Trial by Jury'*, 2nd edn of the former (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000).

5 *The Holy Greyhound*, 171.

(if implicitly) mean by *language* in this phrase is not language itself, but the products of language: texts. To take one example, whose words stand as an excellent representation of the approaches which I have taken here to Anglo-Saxon beliefs about *ælfe*, Stuart Clark, in his *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, wrote that

> the assumption that beliefs in witchcraft were essentially incorrect . . . has prevailed in witchcraft studies for so long because of an overriding, though largely unspoken, commitment to the realist model of knowledge. In this model, language is seen as a straightforward reflection of a reality outside itself and utterances are judged to be true or false according to how accurately they describe objective things. This kind of neutral reference to the external world is held to be the only reliable source of meaning and, indeed, the most important property of language. In consequence, it has been possible to account for witchcraft beliefs (like any others) in only two ways. First, they have been submitted, if only implicitly, to empirical verification to see whether they corresponded to the real activities of real people. With important exceptions, the answer has been 'no'. The entity 'witchcraft' has turned out to be a non-entity, because for the most part it had no referents in the real world. Once tested in this manner, witchcraft beliefs have then either been dismissed out of hand as mistaken and, hence, irrational, or (and this is the second possibility), they have been explained away as the secondary consequences of some genuinely real and determining condition – that is to say, some set of circumstances (social, political, economic, biological, psychic, or whatever) that was objectively real in itself but gave rise to objectively false beliefs.[6]

Clark concluded that

> for the situation to change, a different notion of language will have to be considered – in particular, that it should not be asked to follow reality but be allowed to constitute it. Here, the object of attention would become language itself, not the relationship between language and the extra-linguistic world. And the aim would be to uncover the linguistic circumstances that enable the utterances and actions associated with witchcraft belief to convey meaning. This would not, of course, transform impossibilities into possibilities, or mistakes into truths. Rather – and this is the crux of the matter – these distinctions would themselves become irrelevant; the idea of making them would no longer itself make historical sense. Witchcraft's apparent lack of reality as an objective fact would simply become a non-issue, and the consequent need to reduce witchcraft beliefs to some more real aspect of experience would go away.[7]

Where my approach differs from Clark's is that, his emphasis on the word *language* notwithstanding, his book is in practice about texts. Whereas some commentary, then, would position current researchers 'in the wake of the linguistic turn', it might rather be said from the perspective of the present study that they are still awaiting the bowwave.[8] For the study of early-

6 *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 4; cf. pp. 3–10.

7 *Thinking with Demons*, 6.

8 John E. Toews, 'Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience', *American Historical Review*, 92 (1987), 879–907, at 882. For a prominent example of similar stirrings elsewhere in cultural history, see Jean Starobinsky, *Action et réaction: vie et aventures d'un couple* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

medieval non-Christian beliefs, this wave should have the power to rock some well-moored boats: whereas we have few narratives relevant to this kind of enquiry, we have relatively rich lexical data.

The semantic field of the Old English word *ælf* is an Anglo-Saxon cultural category, whose relationships with other such categories can be mapped through primary evidence. Early-medieval evidence ought to foreground the point that to understand texts, we must understand their component words: early-medieval texts survive in languages which today are unfamiliar and fragmentarily attested; debate about words' meanings is frequent in the contributions to literary and linguistic journals; and the dangers of leaning on modern native-speaker intuitions about meaning tend to be more readily apparent than for more recent sources. However, my reassessments here of scholarship on certain Old English texts have shown that scholars have often failed to take the critical attitude to translations and dictionary definitions which is required to understand the texts. This is not a disciplinary issue, whereby semantics are a matter only for the staff of English departments: primary language research demands a position at the centre of medieval scholarship generally, albeit that the monoglot character of British undergraduate history studies (and therefore teaching) would suggest otherwise. But my arguments go beyond this, to claim that semantics is itself a key to the historical study of past cultures. There is no need to restate the methodological considerations of my introduction, but it is worth emphasising that the approach to semantics which I have used here resists (on the whole) the convention of importing an analytical concept from our culture today and populating it with whatever primary data seem applicable. While this convention is not methodologically invalid in principle, I have shown that it has often gone awry. In particular, scholars have, in parallel to the students of early-modern witchcraft discussed by Clark, striven to distinguish between 'real' and 'supernatural' beings, when our lexical and, where we have it, literary evidence militates against this division. Indeed, despite its prominence in modern Western intellectual thought, it is a division which can restrict understanding even of twentieth-century Western culture.[9] At any rate, liberating our thinking from this assumption is crucial to understanding early-medieval world-views. One suspects that similar reassessments await students of other areas of medieval culture who choose to reconstruct past categories more rigorously on the basis of primary (lexical) evidence. In particular, the corpus of Old High German is dominated by glosses on Latin texts; despite some remarkable past research on this material, it has much more yet to reveal about the world-views of aristocratic Germanic-speaking Franks.[10]

It needs hardly to be added that our capacity for investigating the meanings of medieval words is growing dramatically, partly because of the growing

[9] Timothy R. Tangherlini, 'From Trolls to Turks: Continuity and Change in Danish Legend Tradition', *Scandinavian Studies*, 67 (1995), 32–62.

[10] See for example D. H. Green, *The Carolingian Lord: Semantic Studies on Four Old High German Words: Balder, Frô, Truhtin, Hêrro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

range of traditional resources such as dictionaries and manuscript facsimiles, but also because of electronic text corpora – the example most important to this study being the almost exhaustive *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*. Here I have emphasised the usefulness of this resource not for its main original purpose of facilitating breadth of lexicographical research on Old English words, but for promoting depth in their study. As I have sought to embed the history of *ælf* in the history of Old English, I have been able to reassess from scratch the meanings of more words, more thoroughly, than would once have been possible. Through this practice, it has been possible to embed the history of words more directly into the history of culture and society. The dominant method in modern semantic research – as in natural language acquistion – is to analyse words' contextual meanings, and I have of course focused on this method; but I have also emphasised the amount and usefulness of data encoded in other linguistic characteristics of words, particularly morphology. This relatively holistic attitude to investigating semantics is undeniably partly a product of necessity, but it emphasises the power of holistic approaches to cast surprising light on the meanings of early-medieval words, and so on early-medieval culture.

As I confessed in my introduction, there is much about these methodologies which was well established already in the nineteenth century, so it is worth considering why they have been so long out of favour, and how this relates to my approaches. One factor has been the increasing dominance since the Second World War of Anglo-American research into early-medieval Europe relative to research produced in the German-speaking world: Anglo-American approaches to Old English literature generally were and remain self-consciously opposed to Teutonic philology.[11] But in addition to this, a major reason why the lexical approaches to medieval belief so prominent in earlier research have not since been maintained is probably that in the wake of the Second World War, the National Romantic thinking that underpinned so much nineteenth-century research fell dramatically from grace. My introduction works to re-establish the methodological viability of lexical approaches to culture in a world whose discipline of linguistics would often be unrecognisable to nineteenth-century philologists, but it is worth emphasising some distinctions between National Romantic approaches and my own. At the centre of the National Romantic project was the linking of language to national character, with the concomitant idea that language-groups were to be equated with cultural groups (which should in turn either have nation-states tailored to them, or be shaped until they fitted the nation-states in which they found themselves).[12] Some kind of link (though not necessarily a primordial

[11] Cf. R. D. Fulk and Christopher M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 230–1.

[12] On the primary exponent of these ideas, Johann Gottfried von Herder, see F. M. Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), specifically at 55–62; a classic and pertinent example is the 1844 preface to the second edition of Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*: Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, I v–lv, culminating at lv. Walter Pohl, 'Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity', in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, ed. Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, The

one) between language and culture is central to my arguments here, but I have also shown that this does not need to exclude other kinds of comparison across languages in early-medieval Europe. Accordingly, I have at various points envisaged a north-west European cultural zone rather than an area segmented along the lines of linguistic groups such as Germanic, Celtic or Romance, building my arguments here on narrative rather than linguistic approaches. But the basis for these comparisons in Anglo-Saxon evidence remains detailed semantically oriented analysis, making use of comparative evidence from dialects closely related to Old English. Indeed, I have been able, by combining these approaches, to undermine the long-standing idea (historically cherished both by power-groups that would marginalise Celtic-speaking cultures and those cultures' own nation-builders) that beliefs in otherworldly beings were somehow a distinctively 'Celtic' cultural feature in antique and medieval Europe. Our independent Old English evidence is sufficient for us to conclude that *ælfe* were fundamentally similar to the early Irish *áes síde*, but with close counterparts among other Germanic-speaking cultures, a claim which my comparative work in chapter 5 consolidated. This perspective reverses some long-standing discourses: medieval Ireland, rich both in narratives and in lexical evidence, no longer looks like an idiosyncratic periphery of Europe, but rather provides an outstanding candidate for a case-study in what we might call early-medieval European fairy-belief. This is not to propose that Irish beliefs were European beliefs, but that they can provide us with a new and proximate framework for understanding patchier Continental evidence.

Another characteristic of research linked with the National Romantic movement was the realisation that contemporary folkore was often remarkably similar to beliefs attested centuries, and sometimes millennia, earlier. The enormous significance of this observation is not, of course, to be underrated. But it also encouraged scholars to use the evidence of later cultures to interpret or reconstruct earlier ones. Using present or recent knowledge as a means to understanding the past is inherent in scholarship and probably in human cognition, and I make no pretence to avoiding it here. But the incautious deployment of diachronic comparative evidence is also liable to flatten variation in our evidence, underplaying change and so both disengaging evidence for beliefs from wider evidence for historical change, and reducing the reliability of potentially equally significant claims to continuity. I have tried to tread more carefully in this regard than many of my predecessors, focusing on the deep analysis of our Old English data, and endeavouring to recognise not only continuities but discontinuities in the material. The comparative material I have used was chosen for its geographical and chronological proximity – whether early-medieval Ireland and Scandinavia, or the very earliest extensive attestations of elf-beliefs among non-aristocratic English-speakers, in the

Transformation of the Roman World, 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 17–69, made an influential case against the connection of language and ethnicity (and so, to some extent, culture) in early-medieval Europe.

early-modern Scottish witchcraft trials. Once more, such comparisons point towards new avenues for future research. One of the many strands in trying to explain the violence and destruction which the early-modern witch-hunts entailed is trying to understand the diachronic development of belief-systems which made them possible. Some important work on this area has delved back into the high Middle Ages, but it has not looked extensively to the early Middle Ages.[13] Those who have chosen to study early-modern witchcraft in a diachronic perspective have generally sought to relate their datasets less to early-medieval beliefs than to a hypothetical, prehistoric, shamanic past – an approach which has, amongst other reasons for want of data, so far rarely proved convincing.[14] The present study shows generally that early-medieval beliefs are sufficiently recoverable to have a place in the history of early-modern witchcraft, and emphasises specifically the prospect in Germanic-speaking Europe of beliefs in sources of supernatural harm other than witches. Building on the arguments of Hutton, I have argued elsewhere that fairies are probably systematically under-represented in the evidence of the witchcraft trials for the obvious reason that they could not be apprehended and tried.[15] Their importance in the wider belief-systems facilitating the eventuation or absence of witch-hunts may likewise have been underrated.

One outcome of this study, then, is that it is possible to show, on a sound basis of evidence, fundamental continuities in Anglo-Saxon traditional beliefs from before the time of conversion to the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. Important though this is, however, I prefer to emphasise our evidence that *ælf*-beliefs changed: this emphasises their continued vitality and, one presumes, relevance in Anglo-Saxon (aristocratic) culture following conversion. Imposing unwarranted assumptions on the interpretation on both the words which comprise our Old English medical texts, and the meanings of the texts themselves, commentators have hitherto envisaged an Anglo-Saxon tradition of invisible, sprite-like, arrow-shooting 'elves', which they took to be inherited from pre-migration Germanic culture. Although a re-examination of our medical texts does not disprove this interpretation as such, the inferences on which it rests are untenable. In particular, I have dismantled the scholarly construct of 'elf-shot' – magical arrows fired by *ælfe* and causing illness. These are never attested in medieval English. In fact, the best attested means for *ælfe* to inflict illness is a kind of magic denoted by the words *ælfsīden* and *sīdsa*, both cognates of the much-discussed Scandinavian *seiðr*. I have contextualised

[13] Most notably Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*, rev. edn (London: Pimlico, 1993); see more recently Hans Peter Broedel, *The 'Malleus maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

[14] For example, Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Penguin, 1992) (first publ. *Storia Notturna* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989)); Wolfgang Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoecklin and the Phantoms of the Night*, trans. H. C. Midelfort (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1998) (first publ. *Chonrad Stoeckhlin und die Nachtschar: Eine Geschichte aus der frühen Neuzeit*, Serie Piper, 2095 (Munich: Piper, 1994)).

[15] 'Getting Shot', 32–4; cf. Hutton, 'The Global Context'.

our later textual evidence by the analysis of our earliest evidence: patterns in the Anglo-Saxon personal-name system, and prehistoric morphological restructurings affecting *ælf* and other words in its declension, corroborated by analyses of our earliest Scandinavian evidence for the meanings of *ælf*'s cognate *álfr*. This material shows that early Anglo-Saxon *ælfe* were human-like, as they remained in many varieties of belief for over a thousand years. Moreover, the evidence suggests that early Anglo-Saxon ideologies drew a fundamental distinction between the human in-group and the monsters which threatened its fabric, and that in this opposition, *ælfe* were fundamentally aligned with the in-group. Distinguishing this somewhat liminal class from both the in-group and the monsters, I have labelled it *otherworldly*. This gives us a more plausible and better-evidenced picture of continuity in non-Christian Anglo-Saxon belief than we have enjoyed hitherto, while also providing new insights into how group identities were formed and maintained in the earliest stages of Anglo-Saxon society.

Contrary to established thinking, our Old English medical texts do not contradict this reconstruction. Indeed, although they clearly associate *ælfe* with causing illness and with demons, they equally link *ælfe* with themes which are well paralleled in Old Irish, medieval Scandinavian and Middle English narratives about human-like, non-monstrous otherworldly beings inflicting ailments on people. Following the implications of these comparative texts, it is possible to read *ælfe* in Anglo-Saxon ideologies as powerful, and dangerous to members of the in-group – but dangerous only to members who transgress certain social norms. Whereas monsters threaten the whole of society, *ælfe* exert their threats to maintain society. This is no more than an interpretation, which may hold better for idealising, literary narratives than the more messy day-to-day reality of diagnosing and healing illnesses. But it is at least clear that we can read our Old English medical texts plausibly to reflect traditional and coherent belief-systems. Meanwhile, the medical texts generally show unease about the relationship of *ælfe* to demons. Not only were Anglo-Saxon clerics – Latin-literate men of royal courts – ready to believe in the power of *ælfe*, but when it came to the crunch they were far from confident that chasing away *dēoflas* would also undo *ælfe*'s harm. Medical anthropology also suggests the potential of these belief-systems to be manipulated in clinically efficacious ways. Anglo-Saxon medicine has traditionally been characterised in scholarship by its unfamiliarity, and although recent efforts to reinterpret it within the orthodox frameworks of Western twentieth-century clinical medicine have produced important insights, their failings have to a significant extent served to show that Anglo-Saxon medicine cannot be fully understood in these terms. Delving into our evidence for the roles of *ælfe* in inflicting illness provides a means of facing the differences between Anglo-Saxon culture and our own, and of trying to reconstruct the framework of assumptions and cultural categories in which Anglo-Saxon medical texts were rational and meaningful.

Linking our earliest evidence for *ælf*-beliefs with later textual sources also provides a new basis for detecting change in beliefs over time. By interpreting

later evidence using only chronologically and geographically close comparative material (and by using this only with caution), while paying attention to the linguistic details of our Old English texts, I have identified change and variation within Anglo-Saxon beliefs. Demonisation is one change. It is apparent relatively early on, most clearly in *Beowulf* and in what seems to be the use of *ælf* as a synonym for *Satanas* in the Royal Prayerbook, of around 800. This is a development which is to be expected, so in this respect the continuities in belief which persist in other texts is more striking. Unexpected, however, is the evidence of Old English glosses on Latin words for nymphs. These suggest that on the one hand female *ælfe* were minor components in early Anglo-Saxon belief-systems, if indeed they existed at all, and on the other that they rose to prominence during the Anglo-Saxon period. Interpreting the implications of this is tricky, but if nothing else this evidence shows Anglo-Saxon non-Christian belief to have remained dynamic after conversion – even among the monks to whom we owe our texts.

This relates to my remaining main theme: Anglo-Saxon gendering. I have argued that the development of a female denotation of *ælf* relates to older traditions in which – contrary to the expectations of Anglo-Saxon gendering established by our mainstream sources and by the formative modern historiography – male *ælfe* exhibited gender-transgressing traits. These traits are attested by our (Anglo-)Scandinavian portrayal of the *álfr* Vǫlundr; the evidence that *ælf* was the closest Old English equivalent to Latin words for nymphs despite glossators' concern that it did not prototypically denote females; *ælfe*'s paradigmatic association with seductive feminine beauty in the word *ælfscȳne*; and the Scandinavian comparative evidence that the magic *ælfsīden* was considered inappropriate to males. Viewing this material in connection with evidence for martial supernatural females, usually called *hægtessan*, in Anglo-Saxon beliefs, I have inferred an early Anglo-Saxon mythological system which helped to define gender norms by showing their mirror image: effeminate *ælfe* and martial female *hægtessan*. (This conceivably also provided a paradigm for members of early Anglo-Saxon communities to gain power by performing gender transgressions themselves). As the Anglo-Saxon period progressed, non-Christian mythological gendering was reshaped to align it with gender norms, supporting a trend for neatening the alignment of sex and gender. The specific, well-defined and powerful ideologies concerning sex and gender operating in the Christian communities which dominated the production and preservation of Anglo-Saxon texts have left us with a remarkably limited range of perspectives on the processes of gendering in Anglo-Saxon culture. Since then, moreover, close relatives of these Christian ideologies have permeated and to a significant extent shaped orthodox cultural attitudes to gendering in Western societies, leaving us with the sense today of Anglo-Saxon attitudes to gender curiously similar to those traditional in our own societies. Glimpses into non-Christian Anglo-Saxon belief-systems, however, suggest less familiar processes, and perhaps less familiar outcomes. They encourage us to perceive a more complex, diverse and rich history of Anglo-Saxon gender – and culture.

Appendix 1: The Linguistic History of *Elf*

SEVERAL of my arguments in this book rely on details in the linguistic form and history of *ælf*. Although *ælf* is mostly regular in its development in Old English, it was affected by a number of sound-changes, some of whose details have been the subject of debate, and this has led to frequent misunderstandings and misreportings.[1] Fortunately, the relevant processes are clear enough for present purposes. As both an aid to the reader unfamiliar with linguistics or the history of Old English, and to the informed reader faced with mistaken accounts, I include here a history of *elf* up to early Modern English.

The expected, regular sound-changes which *ælf* must have undergone according to standard accounts of Old English phonology are laid out as Figure 7. I use the International Phonetic Alphabet, except that as the phonetic value of the West Saxon spelling <ie> is unclear, I simply repeat the spelling where it is required.

Reconstructing lost forms

As Figure 7 shows, we must reconstruct the etymon of *ælf* as the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stem */ɑlβi-z/. The meanings of this statement and the underlying evidence are:

> Long-stemmed: this means that the root syllable contains a long vowel and/or ends in two consonants. In this case, it ends in two consonants, as all Germanic dialects attest.
>
> *i*-stem: most Germanic noun-stems consisted of a root syllable followed by a vowel, known as a *stem-vowel*. These stem-vowels were usually lost by the time of our attested Old English, but sometimes caused sound-changes elsewhere in the word which were retained. The root-vowels of prehistoric Old English *i*-stem nouns underwent a development known as *i-mutation*, which had different effects in different dialects. The *i*-mutation of */ɑlC-/ (where C stands for any consonant) is the only way to explain the various attested Old English forms of *elf* through regular sound-changes. Old Norse *álfr* and some medieval German plurals do not show the expected *i*-mutation, demanding the reconstruction of early *a*-stem variants (*/ɑlβɑ-z/), but */ɑlβɑ-z/ is not an etymon of the English word.[2]

[1] Cf. Introduction, n. 12. For debate see Richard M. Hogg, 'Using the Future to Predict the Past: Old English Dialectology in the Light of Middle English Place-Names', in *Studies in Middle English Linguistics*, ed. Jacek Fisiak, Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs, 103 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), pp. 207–20, at 207–12.

[2] *Contra MED*, s.v. *elf*; Fran Colman, 'What *is* in a Name?', in *Historical Dialectology: Regional and Social*, ed. Jacek Fisiak, Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs, 37 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988), pp. 111–37, at 199; Edwards, 'Laȝamon's Elves', 79. For variation between long-stemmed masculine *a*-stems in Norse and *i*-stems in other attested Germanic languages

Masculine: this is a largely arbitrary grammatical category. *Ælf* is never, in Old English, coupled with a determiner or adjective which might corroborate its gender. We can therefore infer its gender only from its inflexions and cognates. The inflexions of *ælf* are only partially attested: we have the nominative singular *ælf* (see notably p. 126 above); probably the dative singular *ælfe* (though the example could be an accusative plural; p. 120); the nominative plural *ylfe* (p. 69); and the genitive plural *ylfa* (pp. 2 and 99; both plural forms exhibit the West Saxon root vowel).[3] Of Old English noun-declensions, only the long-stemmed masculine *i*-stems and the feminine *jō*-stems both exhibit these inflections and show *i*-mutation.[4] This choice can then be restricted particularly by the Old Norse *álfr*, which preserves the masculine nominative singular ending *-z* as *-r*. Old High German and Old Frisian forms are also masculine.

The one variable left by these considerations is the original quality of the *f* in *elf*. A few early Old English name-forms in *aelb* and the unique Old English spelling 'ælbinne' suggest that the Old English *f* derives from Germanic /β/.[5] This is confirmed by our rare attestations in East Germanic, where – unsurprisingly in view of the limited subject matter of our Gothic corpus – the *elf*-word is attested only in a few personal names, among them *Alboin*; and in the medieval German dialects where */ɑlβ-/ produced *alb* and *alp* by /β/ > /b/ (> /p/).[6]

It might be expected that *i*-mutation would fail in compounds beginning in */ɑlβi-/, since long-stemmed *i*-stems seem at least sometimes to have lost their *-i* in this context before *i*-mutation occurred.[7] This would have produced compounds in Southern *ealf-* and Anglian *alf-*. But *ealf-* occurs only in names in a few post-Conquest copies of Old English charters, probably reflecting hypercorrect spellings by late scribes; likewise, *Alf-* forms in personal names are probably usually to be attributed variously to Latinate spelling and late confusion of *æ* and *a*. (A genuine *alf*-form, showing failure of *i*-mutation, may occur in the compound *alfwalda* in *Beowulf*, usually emended to *alwalda*;

see Noreen, *Altnordische Grammatik*, §§387–8, *contra* Peters, 'OE *ælf*', 252; another example is Old Icelandic *þurs*, 'ogre', cf. Old English *þyrs*. *Álfr* also exhibits the later lengthening of /ɑ/ before /lf/ (Noreen, *Altnordishe Grammatik*, §124.3). The history of *i*-mutation in the Continental West Germanic dialects has been a subject of considerable debate (see Voyles, *Grammar*, §3.5.3). We would expect Old High German *alp* to develop like its *i*-stem counterpart *gâst* ('guest'), with *alp* in the nominative singular and *elpe* in the plural. But some plurals, such as *alpe* and *alpen*, demand derivation from */ɑlβɑ-/ if we are not to assume some analogical levelling. Old Frisian *a* did not undergo *i*-mutation before /lC/ (Voyles, *Grammar*, §7.1.9).

3 The genitive singular is attested only in place-names in what seem to be examples of a personal name *Ælf* (Hall, 'Are There Any Elves?', pp. 69–70), which may not be morphologically representative (see Colman, 'Names Will Never Hurt Me', 13–17).

4 Campbell, *Grammar*, §§590–3, 599–610; cf. Fulk, *Meter*, 421–2; Alfred Bammesberger, *Die Morphologie des urgermanischen Nomens*, Untersuchungen zur vergleichenden Grammatik der germanischen Sprachen, 2 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1990), 123–7; Hogg, 'Phonology', 131–2.

5 Respectively, for example, van Els, *Kassel Manuscript*, 121; ed. Rusche, 'Cleopatra Glossaries', 184 [A463]. *Contra* Colman, *Money Talks*, 201, and '"Elves"', 22, who derived the *f* in Old English *ælf* from Proto-Germanic [f].

6 For East Germanic names see Förstemann, *Namenbuch*, s.v. *ALFI*; cf. Woolf, *Name-Giving*, 223, 230; for German developments Voyles, *Grammar*, §§9.1.15, 9.1.21. In Old Norse the consonant underwent the regular developments /β/ > [v] /f/ > /v/: Voyles, *Grammar*, §5.1.11; cf. Noreen, *Altnordische Grammatik*, §§184.3, 192. In Frisian we have /β/ > /f/: Voyles, *Grammar*, §§7.1.8, 8.1.18.

7 Hogg, *Grammar*, §5.85.11.

		Prehistoric			**Earliest texts (seventh century)**		**Tenth century**
		Pre-OE, with loss of *-z* (Hogg, *Grammar*, §4.10)	First fronting (+ Anglian retraction or failure) (Hogg, *Grammar*, §§5.10–15)	Breaking (Hogg, *Grammar*, §5.20)	*I*-mutation, *-i*-deletion (Hogg, *Grammar*, §§5.79(2a), 5.82, 6.18, 6.20)	/β/ > /f/ (Hogg, *Grammar*, §7.55)	West Saxon <ie> > <y>, /y/; second fronting in some Mercian varieties (Hogg, *Grammar*, §§5.163–68, 5.87); final outcomes
Anglian	Northumbrian (Northern)	*ɑlβiz > *ɑlβi	*ɑlβi	*ɑlβi	ælβ	ælf	ælf
	Mercian (Midland)	*ɑlβiz > *ɑlβi	*ɑlβi	*ɑlβi	ælβ	ælf	ælf, elf
Southern	West Saxon (South-Western)	*ɑlβiz > *ɑlβi	*ælβi	*æ^{u}lβi	*ielβ	*ielf	ylf
	Kentish (South-Eastern)	*ɑlβiz > *ɑlβi	*ælβi	*æ^{u}lβi	*elβ	elf	elf

Figure 7. The phonological development of *ælf*

see chapter 2 n. 75). Nor is **ielf*, the *i*-mutated form of West Saxon */æᵘlβi/, attested (the form <IELF> on coins being an epigraphic variant of <ÆLF>); the absence is worth noting because *ielf* is frequently cited in grammars and dictionaries.[8]

Middle English reflexes

In Middle English, reflexes of *ælf*, *ylf* and *elf* are all attested, in topological distributions consistent, as far as can be judged, with the Old English dialects. The West Saxon vowel is retained in the compound *vluekecche* (with the Anglo-Norman influenced spelling <v~u> for *y*) and may, Kitson has suggested, be the etymon of early Modern English *ouphe* and its later counterpart *oaf*.[9] Otherwise, it was unrounded to /i/, as in *ylues* in the Wade-fragment quoted in chapter 4, and in the reflexes of personal names in the place-names *Ilfracombe* (< **Ylfredes-*), *Elmscott* (< **Ylfmundes-*), *Elvendon Farm* (with variants such as *Ilvingden*; < ?**Ylfingadūn*) and perhaps *Ilsington* (putatively < **Ylfstan-*).[10] In the West Midlands, Anglian *æ* developed before /lC/ as in other contexts: unaffected by second fronting, it coalesced with *a*, giving the forms *alue*, *aluen* found in both manuscripts of Laȝamon's *Brut*.[11] However, in the other reflexes of Anglian dialects, Old English *æ* from */ɑlCi/ became *e* giving *elf*.[12] This was more or less identical with the South-Eastern *elf*, so it was natural that *elf* became the standard English form, being the root used by Chaucer and almost all other later Middle English texts, regardless of their place of origin. Often when *elf* forms the first element of a compound it is followed by what is presumably an inorganic composition vowel, as in *elvene lond*, *vluekecche*.[13]

Like almost all English nouns, *elf* was eventually transferred to the paradigm derived from the masculine *a*-stems, with nominative and accusative plurals in *-es*, as in the form *ylues* mentioned above. However, its plural forms were

8 For example, Hogg, *Grammar*, §5.84, n.4; Campbell, *Grammar*, §200.1 n. 4; Holthausen, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. *ielf*; Wright and Wright, *Old English Grammar*, §385. On the epigraphic forms see Colman, *Money Talks*, 161–2; 'Names Will Never Hurt Me', 22–3.

9 See Fernand Mossé, *A Handbook of Middle English*, trans. James A. Walker, 5th edn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), §§11, 29; ed. Müller, *Prosarezepte*, 89; Kitson, 'Anglo-Saxon Personal Names', 105 n. 25.

10 See above, p. 104; Watts, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.vv. *Ilfracombe*, *Elmscott*, *Ilsington*; Margaret Gelling, *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, English Place-Name Society, 23, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953–4), 1 52.

11 Hogg, *Grammar*, §5.87.

12 K. Luick, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*, 2 vols (Leipzig, CH: Tauchnitz, 1914–40), 1 §366; Richard Jordan, *Handbook of Middle English Grammar: Phonology*, rev. and trans. Eugene Joseph Cook, Janua Linguarum, Series Practica, 218 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), §62; cf. Hogg, 'Old English Dialectology', 207–12.

13 Cf. Campbell, *Grammar*, §367. Cooke has argued that *vluekecche* and some other words show a singular **elfe-*, originating in morphological levellings related to the transference of *ælf* to the weak declension (on which see §5:3.3). However, this form is poorly attested as a simplex and examples are generally late enough that the *-e* may be merely orthographic. His comparisons, *delf~delve* and *shelf~shelve*, occur only as the first element of compounds ('"Aluen swiðe sceone"' , 6–7 n. 18). He interpreted compounds such as *eluene lond* to contain fossilised weak genitive plurals ('"Aluen swiðe sceone"', 2–3), but inorganic theme vowels explain these more elegantly.

in non-West Saxon dialects identical to those of the large feminine *ō*-stem declension and it may at times have been analysed as a member of this class, before transference to the *a*-stem declension, which presumably took place in the North by early Middle English times.[14] Meanwhile, in some Southern and West-Midland varieties, *ælf* was first transferred to the weak noun class inherited from the Indo-European *n*-stems. I have discussed this development in detail in chapter 3.

The West Saxon *ælf*-forms

An exception to the regularity of the Old English texts is that early West Saxon shows the 'Anglian' form *ælf* – to the extent that *ylf* is never attested in the myriad pre-Conquest attestations of Anglo-Saxon personal names, its existence there being vouched for only by the few later attestations of place-names just mentioned. What is important here is that there is no serious doubt that *ælf* was an accepted West Saxon form. That it was not merely a scribal form is shown by other later reflexes of place-names containing *Ælf*-names, and West Saxon hypercorrect forms with *ælf-* for *æl-* (see Appendix 2). The form *ælf* would not have presented a strange or difficult combination of sounds in historical West Saxon: loan-words and the *i*-mutation of *æ* retracted by back-mutation had independently restored /ælC/.[15] Moreover, early West Saxon shows Anglian-type retraction of */ɑ in breaking contexts, in forms like *waldend* for later *wealdend*.[16] The /ɑlC/ forms, when *i*-mutated, should have produced the /ælC/ form found in *ælf*. In practice, these outcomes almost never occur except in *ælf* and probably – depending on the processes of metathesis in the word's history – *wærc* (traditionally considered an 'Anglian' form, but well attested in early West Saxon).[17] But /ɑlCi/ was not a very frequent combination in prehistoric Old English: so although some words in this group were common, such as */ɑldir-/ ('older'), we should not be surprised to see somewhat haphazard levellings within the set. It is not unlikely, then, that variation in the development of */ɑlC/ in West Saxon produced corresponding variation in the development of */ɑlCi/; but that levelling followed in which the variants produced by the *wealdend*-varieties dominated, with rare adoptions from the *waldend*-varieties.

We might understand the variation between early and late West Saxon to reflect competing regional dialects or competing registers, but some sort of variation is clear.[18] It is tempting to suggest that *ælf* specifically gained favour

[14] Mossé, *Middle English*, §55–7.

[15] For example, *ælmæsse* ('alms' < Latin *eleëmosyna*), *pælle* (< Latin *pallium*), *hælfter* ('halter', probably from Old English **haluftri*; cf. the restoration of /ærC/ by metathesis; Hogg, *Grammar*, §7.94.

[16] Cf. E. G. Stanley, 'Spellings of the *Waldend* Group', in *Studies in Language, Literature, and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later*, ed. E. Bagby Atwood and Archibald A. Hill ([Austin]: University of Texas at Austin, 1969), pp. 38–69; Angelika Lutz, 'Spellings of the *Waldend* Group – Again', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 13 (1984), 51–64.

[17] See Hogg, *Grammar*, §5.82 n. 4; Fulk, *Meter*, §335.4; Roberta Frank, 'An Aspirin for *Beowulf*: Against Aches and Pains – *ece* and *wærc*', *ANQ*, 15 (2002), 58–63, at 60–2.

[18] For dialects cf. Hogg, *Grammar*, §5.15; for register Fulk's demonstration that *waldend*-type

over *ylf* because so many early West Saxon-speaking nobles had names in *Ælf-*: given the political dominance of Mercia during much of West Saxon history, this social group was perhaps also the most likely to speak Mercian-style *waldend* varieties, and to insist on Mercian-style pronunciations of their names. It is also conceivable that the singular *ælf* and the plural *ylfe* were sometimes interpreted to show a morphologically significant vowel-alternation. But both points are speculation.

forms were part of the poetic register of Southern Old English, *Meter*, §§318–39; more generally Gretsch, 'Junius Psalter Gloss', 89–106; Colman, 'Names Will Never Hurt Me', 22–5, on the South-Eastern evidence.

Appendix 2: Two Non-Elves

SEVERAL occurrences of *ælf* have been excluded from this book. One is a scribal error, as the correction of another Anglo-Saxon scribe confirms: the form 'se ylfa god' (putatively 'the god of the *ælfe*') for 'se sylfa god' ('God Himself') in psalm 59 of the Paris Psalter.[1] Some other examples of *ælf*, however, stand unaltered in their manuscripts, but have not been considered here because I take them to be hypercorrect forms of words in *æl-*. This position is worth justifying, and offers some tangential support to my arguments above. *Ælfmihtig* occurs three times in a short text in Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 320, folio 117, containing formulas and directions for pastoral use, and dating from around 1000: 'Gelyfst ðū on god ælfmihtine'; 'Ic þē bidde & bēode þæt þū gode ælfmihtigum gehȳrsum sȳ'; 'God ælfmihtig gefultumige ūs' ('Believe in God Almighty'; 'I ask and command that you be obedient to God Almighty'; 'May God Almighty help us').[2] *Ælmihtig* never occurs here. The provenance of this manuscript is unknown, but its language is consistently late West Saxon; there is no other instance of initial /æl-/ in the text for comparison.

Ælfþēod- occurs twice in Brussels, Bibliotheque Royale, MS 1650, but curiously the examples are attributed to different hands (both from about the first quarter of the eleventh century): it would appear that hypercorrection was contagious. Hand A, deriving material from the lost, early Common Recension glossary, glossed *peregre* ('as though foreign') with 'ælfþēodelice', for *ælþēodelice* ('as though foreign').[3] The largely indistinguishable hands CD, deriving once more from a lost body of glosses, gloss *externę peregrinationis* with 'dre ælfþēodi', presumably for *fremdre ælþēodignysse* ('foreign journey abroad').[4] The hypercorrect forms may or may not originate with the Brussels scribes themselves; each has a correct counterpart in Oxford, Bodleian MS Digby 146, which is textually related, but the principle of *lectio difficilior* could be invoked.[5]

The hypercorrection here must relate to the fact that groups of three consonants were liable to lose their middle consonant in West Saxon, which

1 Ed. George Philip Krapp, *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 5 (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 13.

2 Ker, *Catalogue*, 105–6 [no. 58]; ed. *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, Conf 10.2 (CCCC 320) B11.10.2.

3 Ed. Gwara, *Prosa*, II 70 (for provenance, see I 94*–101*, 189*); cf. Goossens, *MS Brussels*, 172 [no. 381].

4 Ed. Gwara, *Prosa*, II 248 (see more generally I 218*–234*); Goossens, *MS Brussels*, 252 [no. 1620].

5 Ed. Gwara, *Prosa*, I 70, 248.

would affect *ælf*-compounds whose second element began with a consonant.[6] How widespread this was or how profound its effects were in the common lexicon is open to doubt, but it had extensive effects on personal names, where *æl-* for *ælf-* is well attested in late Old English.[7] Observing that words, and perhaps particularly names, whose first syllable was spelt as <ælf-> could be pronounced as [æl-], some scribes presumably inferred that some historical *æl-* compounds were actually *ælf-* compounds. This suggests clearly that West Saxon <ælf> is not merely a scribal form of the expected West Saxon form *ylf* – West Saxons evidently might say [ælf]. But the hypercorrection may have involved an element of folk-etymology, in which case the words must reflect a semantic congruence of *ælf* with *-mihtig* and *-þēodig*. In this reading, God was not 'all-mighty', but 'mighty as an *ælf* is mighty'; a foreigner not 'of another people' (*æl-* < **alja-* 'other, foreign, strange'), but 'from an *ælf*-people'. Both of these readings are well paralleled in other Old English evidence and would help to emphasise how late such associations lasted for *ælf* – but unfortunately, such evidence is too tangential to be relied on.[8]

6 Hogg, *Grammar*, §§7.84–6; cf. Goossens, *MS Brussels*, 105.

7 For example, Colman, *Money Talks*, 201–3.

8 *Ælfþēodig* may also have a correlate in the manusripts of Laȝamon's *Brut*: whereas the more conservative Caligula manuscript has King Locrin reject his wife Guendoline, in the words of his accusers, 'for alþeodisc meiden' ('for a foreign maiden', line 1151), the later Otho manuscript calls her 'one aluis maide' ('an elvish maid'; ed. Brook and Leslie, *Laȝamon: Brut*, 1 58–9). But we should perhaps reckon with the meaning 'delusory' in the Otho text (cf. pp. 149–51): *alþeodisc* seems to occur in Middle English only in the *Brut*, and *alþeodi* is rare and restricted to the West Midlands (*MED*, s.vv.), so the meanings of *alþeodisc* may not have been obvious to the redactor(s) behind the Otho text.

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